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KEEPING CONTACT WITH CHILDREN: ASSESSING THE FATHER/CHILD POST-SEPARATION RELATIONSHIP FROM THE MALE PERSPECTIVE

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Keeping Contact with Children: Assessing the Father/Child Post-separation Relationship from the Male Perspective

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY V

PREFACE IX

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. DATA AND METHODS 3

A. Limits of the 1995 General Social Survey on the Family 3

B. Creating the samples of fathers and children 4

C. Defining the frequency of father/child contact 7

III. PROFILE OF FATHERS ACCORDING TO THE FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILDREN 13

A. Child-related socio-demographic characteristics 13

B. Family and economic characteristics of fathers 17

C. Fathers' perceptions of diverse aspects of conjugal and family life 21

IV. FATHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AFTER SEPARATION: FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' EXPECTATIONS 29

A. Data limitations 29

B. Satisfaction with custody arrangements 31

C. Financial contribution to children's upkeep 36

D. The role of the legal system in child custody arrangements 38

V. FACTORS AFFECTING THE FREQUENCY OF FATHER/CHILD CONTACT 41

A. Socio-demographic characteristics 41

B. Attitudes to, and perceptions of, the paternal role 47

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION 51

APPENDIX 1 55

REFERENCES 57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Number of biological or adopted children aged 0-17 years whose parents were living apart at the time of the survey, by sex of the responding parent 4

Table 2: Distribution of respondents living apart from the other biological parent of their children at the time of the survey, by sex and age group, and by the number and age of their children 6

Table 3: Distribution of biological or adopted children aged 0-17 years reported by their father or mother, according to the number of days spent with their father in the twelve months preceding the survey 8

Table 4: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years not living full-time with their father, according to the time spent with him and the frequency of letter and telephone contact with him during the year preceding the survey 9

Table 5: Number of children and fathers according to the frequency of father/child contact 11

Table 6: Distribution (%) of children 0-17 years, according to the time spent with their father, by various socio-demographic characteristics 14

Table 7: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and by the fathers' conjugal and parental trajectory 18

Table 8: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and by certain economic characteristics of the father 19

Table 9: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and their perception of various aspects of the paternal role 22

Table 10: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and according to their perception of feminine and masculine roles 25

Table 11: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and according to their attitudes towards happiness 27

Table 12: Numbers of children included in the analysis of certain variables concerning custody arrangements, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father 30

Table 13: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to the level of satisfaction of fathers and mothers with 1) the child's living arrangements and 2) the amount of father/child contact, by the time spent with the father 32

Table 14: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to 1) whether or not they receive financial assistance from their father and 2) the level of satisfaction with this support, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father 37

Table 15: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to 1) whether or not custody had been settled through the legal system and 2) how far the respondents had kept to the court's recommendation, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father 39

Table 16: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of the survey and the time elapsed since separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children 43

Table 17: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of the survey and at the time of separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children 45

Table 18: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of separation and the time elapsed since separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children 46

Table 19: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at separation and the time elapsed since separation) and attitudinal variables on the time that separated fathers spend with their children 48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Frequency of contact by letter or telephone according to time spent with father 10

Figure 2: Distribution of children according to type of union at birth and time spent with father 15

Figure 3: Distribution of children according to age at separation and time spent with father 16

Figure 4: Distribution of fathers according to yearly income and time spent with children 21

Figure 5: Effect of divorce on relationship with children according to time spent with them 23

Figure 6: Proportion of fathers satisfied with children's living arrangements and time spent with them 34

Figure 7: Proportion of mothers and fathers dissatisfied with their children's living arrangements according to time spent with the father 35

SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken during the winter of 1999-2000 for the Child Support Team of the Department of Justice Canada. The authors were requested to analyze variations in the frequency of father/child contact following parental separation using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) (cycle 10) of the Family, carried out in 1995 by Statistics Canada. For the first time in Canada, this survey collected information not only from separated mothers but also from fathers. Separated parents replied to questions concerning the amount of time each of their children had spent with them, and with their other parent, during the year preceding the survey. This information made it possible to adopt a father- rather than a mother-centred approach, and to take into consideration men's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, their parental role.

This report includes:

- A profile of separated fathers according to the frequency of contact with their children.
- A comparison of statements made by separated mothers and fathers regarding their expectations for their children's care (type of custody, frequency of contact, child support).
- An analysis of the factors likely to increase the amount of contact between fathers and children.

PRINCIPAL RESULTS

According to reports by fathers, the amount of time children of separated parents spend with their father is highly variable.

Almost one-third of children reported by fathers had very frequent contact with their father—spending at least five months with him during the twelve months preceding the survey. At the other extreme, almost a quarter of children had very little contact with him (less than seven days), and one child out of six had no contact at all. In reality, the picture is more sombre than that painted here, given the under-representation of fathers in the sample contacted by the 1995 GSS who had little or no contact with their children.

Communicating by letter or telephone does not act as a substitute for visits by fathers who live far from their children.

The more often men see their children, the more they are likely to contact them frequently by letter or telephone. Moreover, the majority of fathers who communicate regularly by letter or telephone live relatively close to their children.

The conjugal and parental life course of the majority of separated fathers does not stop at the relationship within which the child was born.

After separating from their child's mother, more than half the fathers had formed a new union by the time of the survey; around one father in eight had lived with the children of a new partner, and a similar proportion had fathered children within a new union.

Separated fathers behave in much the same way with each of their children, once the characteristics of these children have been controlled for.

The multi-level regression analysis showed that most of the observed variation in the number of days that fathers spend with children comes from differences between the fathers, indicating that differences between children of the same father are relatively small.

The age of the child when his/her parents separate has a strong influence on the amount of father/child contact.

Overall, the older the children at the time of the parents' separation, the more frequent the contact with the father at the time of the survey. More precisely, the number of days that children spent with their father increased as the child's age at separation rose, up to the age of 5.5 years; subsequently, the number of days remained relatively stable until the age of 10 years, at which point it started to rise again sharply.

The greater the distance between the homes of the separated parents, the smaller the amount of time fathers and children spend together.

Children living 50 kilometres or more from their father's home spend much less time with their father than those living less than 10 kilometres away.

Fathers in part-time employment spend considerably less time with their children than those in regular full-time work.

This finding probably reflects the fact that men who have regular daytime work have fixed schedules that may correspond more closely to those of children than do the more irregular schedules of part-time workers, and that these men have higher incomes, which are associated with more frequent father/child contact. From this result, it appears that some fathers whose income prevents them from fulfilling their financial obligations prefer to break off contact with their children rather than continue to be in a situation they find too difficult.

Fathers who hold positive attitudes about fatherhood spend more time with their children.

Fathers who consider that having a child made them happier, and who claim to be satisfied with custody arrangements and with the time they spend with their children, are also those who spend the most time with them. These results present an image of involved fathers that contrasts with the one often touted by the media, that of absent fathers losing interest in their children.

CONCLUSION

Fathers' propensity to fulfill their financial obligations towards their children after separation is closely linked to the amount of contact they have with them. Determining the factors likely to increase the frequency of father/child contact is therefore crucial to the process of reducing the risk of poverty to which children of separated parents are exposed. The present analysis of 1995 GSS data constitutes a first step in this direction, but more sophisticated analyses are essential if we hope to better understand the process set in motion by separation.

First, research on this question should take a longitudinal approach, following the same individuals through different stages of their lives. Only data of this type would enable us to

disentangle the cohort effect from that caused by the simple passage of time in the results of the present study. The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), which tracks a large sample of Canadian children through childhood, could be used to clarify how father/child contact evolves following parental separation. However, as very few fathers replied to the NLSCY questionnaire, this survey will not make it possible to broach the question of father/child contact directly from the male point of view. In this respect, the 2001 GSS has strong research potential. First, the majority of difficulties experienced in this study (such as the problem with the pathways followed by the questionnaire) should be ironed out by the next survey. In addition, the sample is significantly larger than in 1995, and should therefore permit more detailed analyses than those carried out here. Moreover, given the increase in the number of children experiencing the breakdown of their parents' union, the proportion of male respondents who are separated from the mother of their children should be higher than in the past.

PREFACE

In December 1998, the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access released its report, *For the Sake of the Children*, which underscored the difficult emotional and often painful issues that face separating and divorcing parents, and recommended possible legislative reforms. In responding to the report, the Government of Canada developed a *Strategy for Reform* to address issues relating to parenting arrangements after divorce. A key element of that strategy involves more detailed research in a number of areas, among them the collection and analysis of reliable data on the arrangements parents make when they separate or divorce regarding the care of their children and the contact they want to maintain with them.

Cycle 10 of Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (1995), which deals with the family, provides a useful tool in this regard. It is a unique source of information on fathers, their attitudes and patterns of contact with their children after separation or divorce. In the context of its work on child support, custody and access, the Department of Justice Canada commissioned an analysis of the data of this study. This is the report on that research.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years, changes in adult conjugal behaviour have profoundly affected the relationship between fathers and their children. Marital breakdown escalated following the introduction of the 1968 *Divorce Act* and the institution of marriage lost ground to cohabition at first as the entry into conjugal life, and more recently as the context for starting a family; this has led to a noticeable increase in the proportion of children living through parental separation, and at an increasingly early age. Almost a quarter of Canadian children born at the end of the 1980s had already experienced life with a single parent by the age of six; among children born at the beginning of the 1970s, this same proportion was not reached until the age of fifteen (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais, 1999).

After their parents separate, the vast majority of children continue living with their mother. Daily contact with their father can, therefore, no longer be taken for granted and, from that point on, the quality and frequency of the relationship between fathers and children are determined by their parents often-conflicting expectations. The small amount of research carried out in the U.S.A. or Europe on the impact of father/child contact, or the lack thereof, on child development has been inconclusive (for a review, see Seltzer, 1994). Research does concur, however, on the positive relationship between maintaining contact and regular payment of child support, which might lead one to suppose that regular contact could reduce the risk of poverty to which children of separated parents are exposed (Jacobsen and Edmondson, 1993; McLanahan et al., 1994; Seltzer, 1991). These results underline the importance of undertaking research from the male perspective, rather than adopting the usual practice of basing analyses on information from mothers, if we are to reach a better understanding of the factors influencing whether or not fathers maintain contact with their children (for the case in favour of such an approach, see Goldscheider and Kaufman, 1996). This is the objective of the present study, based on data from the 1995 General Social Survey on the Family (GSS).

More precisely, the purpose of this research is to describe the characteristics, values and attitudes of separated fathers and identify the factors and circumstances that influence the probability that they maintain contact with their children after union breakdown. The analysis is carried out in three steps. In the first, we present a profile of fathers according to the frequency of contact they have with their children. To be more specific, we attempt to determine whether the amount of contact varies according to demographic (child's age at parents' separation, time elapsed since separation) or socio-economic (education, income) characteristics of fathers and according to their perception of certain aspects of conjugal and parental life. This analysis is based entirely on data gathered directly from fathers.

The second step contrasts statements made by separated mothers and fathers about their expectations with regard to their children's care (custody arrangements, frequency of contact, child support) and their level of satisfaction with current arrangements. In other words, we attempt to verify if the degree of satisfaction reported for any given level of father/child contact varies with the sex of the parent interviewed. It must be noted here that the mothers and fathers contacted at the 1995 GSS do not give information on the same children. This assessment is thus primarily an exploratory one, and all the more so because, as will be discussed later, the sample of fathers replying to certain questions is relatively small.

The third and final section presents the findings of a multivariate analysis, performed to evaluate the net effect of factors influencing the frequency of father/child contact.

II. DATA AND METHODS

A. LIMITS OF THE 1995 GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY ON THE FAMILY

Cycle 10 of the General Social Survey was carried out by Statistics Canada in 1995. For the first time in Canada, this survey collected information on the frequency of contact between fathers and children not only from separated mothers but also from fathers (though not from both parents of the same child). More than 10,000 men and women aged eighteen and over replied to questions concerning all the children they had given birth to or raised during their life. Separated parents were also asked to state how much time they had spent with each of their children during the year preceding the survey and how much contact each child had had with the other parent. The information reported by fathers enabled us to measure directly the time they spent with their children and to construct a socio-demographic profile of these fathers according to the frequency of father/child contact.

Exploiting the 1995 GSS data was not problem-free. First, an earlier study had shown that the quality of information provided by men concerning children from previous unions was inferior to that supplied by women. In theory, one would expect separated mothers and fathers participating in the survey to declare approximately the same number of biological children as mothers and fathers who were still together at the time of the survey had done (see Juby and Le Bourdais, 1999). However, our study showed this to be far from the case: of the children whose parents were living apart at the time of the survey, almost two-thirds were declared by female respondents, i.e. by their mother. In other words, male respondents not living with the mother of their children, i.e. separated fathers, reported 40 percent fewer children than separated mothers. These findings support those found in other studies (Furstenberg, 1988; Poulain *et al.*, 1991; Rendall *et al.*, 1997; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994) and result from the fact that, on the one hand, surveys have more difficulty contacting separated fathers than mothers and, on the other, separated fathers are more likely than separated mothers to under-report the number of children they have had in the past. Given this difference in reporting according to the sex of the responding parent, we were unable to create a single sample of children by combining reports from fathers and mothers to analyze the frequency of father/child contact without introducing an important bias into the results.

In addition, the comparison of reports by fathers and mothers demonstrated that under-reporting particularly affected fathers with little or no contact with their children, and who paid no child support, while those with a regular contact were much more likely to declare them (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1999). As long as this limitation is kept in mind, however, it is possible to extract from the analysis of data provided by fathers some very valuable information on the contact they have with their children.

The process of data collection itself is the source of the second problem encountered in the exploitation of GSS data. Given the complexity of pathways that had to be followed in the GSS questionnaire, some questions were not put to particular groups of respondents. The questions on whether or not custody arrangements had been settled in court, for instance, were omitted for children declared to have spent the entire year prior to the survey with the other parent. This

made difficult, if not impossible, some of the analyses that we had intended to carry out; we will return to these problems later on.

B. CREATING THE SAMPLES OF FATHERS AND CHILDREN

This study concerns only biological or adopted children, declared by male or female respondents, who were aged 0 to 17 years at the time of survey and whose parents (biological or adoptive) were not living together at the time of the survey; thus, any children from an earlier union of the respondent's current partner, and children aged eighteen or over in 1995, were excluded from the sample.

An analysis of the frequency of father/child contact could adopt either the fathers' perspective, and be based on a sample of fathers, or the children's, using a sample of children. Selecting the father as the unit of analysis avoids attributing too high a weight to the characteristics of fathers with several children. However, a cursory examination of the data showed that fathers often spend different amounts of time with their various children. Custody arrangements may vary among siblings: a father might, for instance, have his adolescent son living with him full time while a younger child might only visit every other weekend. In addition, children reported by a father may not all have the same mother, in which case they are very likely to have different custody arrangements. To take these variations in the levels of father/child contact into consideration, we first constructed a sample of children.

Table 1: Number of biological or adopted children aged 0-17 years whose parents were living apart at the time of the survey, by sex of the responding parent

	Respondent	
	Father	Mother
Total number of children[a]	477	832
Exclusions:		
- Other parent deceased	15	45
- Does not know if other parent alive	6	33
- Missing	9	9
- Other (child seldom with either parent)	4	13
Number of children whose parents are alive but not together	443	732
Number of parents of the children in the sample	311	449
Other exclusions:		
- Children excluded because of missing data	25	56
For analyses based on the time spent with father:		
Number of children	418	676
Number of parents	291	414

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

To do this, we proceeded in the following way (see Table 1). From the information provided by the male and female respondents, we first selected all biological or adopted children aged from 0 to 17 years whose biological or adoptive parents were not living together at the time of survey (477 children reported by fathers, 832 by mothers), and retained only those with both parents still living. Thus, among the children declared by fathers, 15 children whose mother had died were ineligible, as were six others for whom the mothers' fate was unknown. Thirteen additional children were excluded from the sample: 9 for whom no information on the mother was available, and four others with discrepancies in the information collected. Overall, 34 children declared by fathers and 100 by mothers were excluded. The remaining sample of children reported by fathers equalled 443 children declared by 311 fathers, compared with 732 children reported by 449 mothers.

In the course of the following analyses, we will at times use the child sample, at others the father sample. When the variable being examined is based on information available for each child (such as the amount and type of contact, the child's age at the time of the survey and at separation, the level of satisfaction with the custody arrangements), the child sample will be used. Analyses of fathers' characteristics at the time of the survey (age, education, income and perception of the paternal role), however, will be carried out on the father sample.

The distribution of mothers and fathers according to the number and age of their children, presented in Table 2, makes clearer the link between the two samples. Three age categories were defined to describe the children declared by the same parent: 1) the respondent has at least one preschool-aged child (0-5 years); 2) the parent has no child of preschool age, but at least one child of primary school age (6-11 years); 3) all children are of secondary school age (12-17 years).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents living apart from the other biological parent of their children at the time of the survey, by sex and age group, and by the number and age of their children

	Father						Mother					
	Age group						Age group					
	< 30	30-39	40-49	50+	N*	%	< 30	30-39	40-49	50+	N*	%
Number	50	120	115	26	311		113	210	115	11	449	
%	16.2	38.5	37.0	8.3		100	25.1	46.8	25.7	2.4		100
Number of children aged 0-17 years:												
- 1	82.4	54.1	61.6	77.0	197	63.4	64.3	44.4	45.3	86.2	227	50.6
- 2	13.3	40.7	33.1	23.0	99	31.9	26.2	38.8	46.6	13.8	166	371
- 3 or more	4.3	5.2	5.3	---	15	4.7	9.5	16.8	8.1	---	56	12.3
Total	100	100	100	100	311	100	100	100	100	100	449	100
Age group of children:												
At least 1 child aged 0-5 years	83.6	22.2	9.2	---	79	25.5	79.5	26.9	4.1	---	151	33.6
At least 1 child aged 6-11 years (none aged 0-5)	16.4	52.0	36.2	14.6	116	37.3	20.5	41.6	35.3	9.6	152	33.9
All children aged 12-17 years	---	25.8	54.6	85.4	116	37.2	---	31.5	60.6	90.4	146	32.5
Total	100	100	100	100	311	100	100	100	100	100	449	100

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
* Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

A first observation is that mothers not living with the father of their children are younger than fathers in the same situation. While three-quarters of fathers and mothers are aged between 30 and 49 years, one mother in four is under thirty 30 compared with one father in six. This is undoubtedly due in part to the age difference traditionally observed between spouses. Mothers also report a greater number of children than fathers. Almost two-thirds (63.4 percent) of fathers only reported one child under the age of 18 at the time of the survey, compared with half the mothers; in contrast, less than 5 percent of fathers declared three or more children as against 12.3 percent of mothers. The age of parents is closely linked to the number and age of reported children. Take, for example, the higher percentage of fathers aged 30 to 49 years with two or more children; one can assume that fathers under 30 have scarcely begun their paternal career, while some of the children of those aged over 50 will already have reached the age of majority. Finally, while a substantial majority of fathers (75 percent) have no child under six, almost all the young fathers (under 30) had a child of this age.

C. DEFINING THE FREQUENCY OF FATHER/CHILD CONTACT

Within the framework of the GSS on the Family, respondents living apart from their children's other parent were asked to specify the number of hours, days, weeks or months that they spent with each of their children in the course of the 12 months preceding the survey; they were also asked for an estimate of the amount of time each child had spent with the other parent. This information, recoded in the micro-data file produced by Statistics Canada, as a number of days permitted us to classify the children according to the frequency of contact with their father;[1] 25 children for whom this information was missing had to be excluded from the analysis, reducing our sample to 418 children (and 291 fathers; see Table 1).

Table 3 presents the distribution of children reported by their fathers, according to the number of days, grouped into eight categories, that they spent together in the 12 months preceding the survey. Three children in ten (30.4 percent[2]) lived at least five months with their father, with around one child in eight spending 10 months or more with him; at the other extreme, one child in six spent no time at all with their father in the previous year. It is important to remember that our child sample overestimates the amount of father/child contact, as children spending less than two months per year with their father are significantly under-represented (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1999). The real proportion of children with little contact with their father is likely to be substantially higher than that observed here, as is suggested by the information given by mothers. According to their reports, one child in four had no contact with his father in the twelve months preceding the survey, and only 16.8 percent of children (half of the proportion declared by the fathers) spent five months or more with him.

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[1] For a certain number of children, it was necessary to adjust the number of days reported by the respondent. For example, since fathers who declared that their children lived with them full time were not asked the number of days they spent with them, we estimated this number by subtracting from 365 the number of days these children spent with their mother. In addition, when the total number of days spent with the mother and father exceeded 365, we imputed the number of days spent with the respondent as the difference between 365 and the number of days the child spent with his other parent.

[2] Calculated by adding 13.5 + 4.0 + 12.9.

Table 3: Distribution of biological or adopted children aged 0-17 years reported by their father or mother, according to the number of days spent with their father in the twelve months preceding the survey

	Respondent	
	Father[a]	Mother[b]
Number of days spent with the father	%	
None	16.8	24.7
1-6 days (less than 1 week)	6.6	9.4
7-29 days (less than 1 month)	8.2	11.6
30-59 days (1 to 2 months)	14.6	17.0
60-149 days (2 to 5 months)	23.4	20.5
150-209 days (5 to 7 months)	13.5	6.7
210-299 days (7 to 10 months)	4.0	3.3
300-365 days (10 months and over)	12.9	6.8
Total	100	100
N[c]	418	676

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

a 25 cases excluded, where information on the number of days spent with the father is missing. These cases have been excluded from the following tables.

b 56 cases excluded, where information on the number of days spent with the father is missing. These cases have been excluded from the following tables.

c Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

In the following analyses, we have grouped the children in four categories, according to the time spent with their father. The first category contained those children who had, for all practical purposes, lost contact with their father, grouping together those who had spent fewer than seven days in the previous year with him. At the opposite extreme, we sought to isolate the children who had maintained a close relationship with their father, including in the same category children who spent five months (150 days) or more with him in the 12 months preceding the survey.[3] Children spending one week to two months (7-59 days) and two to five months (60-149 days) with their father formed the two intermediate categories. The distribution of children at the centre of almost all the ensuing analyses can be summarized as follows:

1) less than one week: little or no contact (23.4 percent of children);

2) between one week and two months: low level of contact (22.8 percent of children);

3) between two and five months: regular contact (23.4 percent) of children);

4) five months or more: close contact (30.4 percent of children).

One criticism that might be levelled against the approach taken here is that spending time with someone is not the only way to maintain links. Making a telephone call or writing a letter could also be effective means of keeping contact, particularly when distance prevents frequent visits. Using the GSS data, we attempted to measure the extent to which these means could serve as an alternative to visiting. The findings, presented in Table 4 and Figure 1, reassured us immediately

[3] In the micro-data file, the stated numbers of days are clustered around multiples of 30 (30 days, 60 days, etc.).

as to the risk of underestimating the level of father/child contact that might be incurred by restricting our measurement of this contact to the amount of time fathers and children spent in each other's company.

In the course of the 1995 GSS, separated respondents were asked how often, in the previous 12 months, they had contacted each child by letter or telephone when the child was not with them; they were also asked for an estimate of this type of contact with the other parent. The first question was not asked for children declared to be living full-time with the respondent; as a result, 67[4] of the 418 children reported by their father have been excluded from the following analysis.

Table 4: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years not living full-time with their father, according to the time spent with him and the frequency of letter and telephone contact with him during the year preceding the survey

Frequency of contact by letter or telephone[a]	Time spent with father				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
Daily	5.6	4.0	10.8	31.3	11.4
At least once a week	17.3	56.3	67.1	47.3	46.9
At least once a month	22.9	22.8	13.2	8.0	17.4
Less than once a month	17.4	9.1	2.2	4.5	8.6
Never	36.8	7.8	6.7	8.9	15.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N[b]	98	92	95	66	351

$\chi^2 = 111.717$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 1

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

[a] Excludes 67 children declared living full-time with their father.

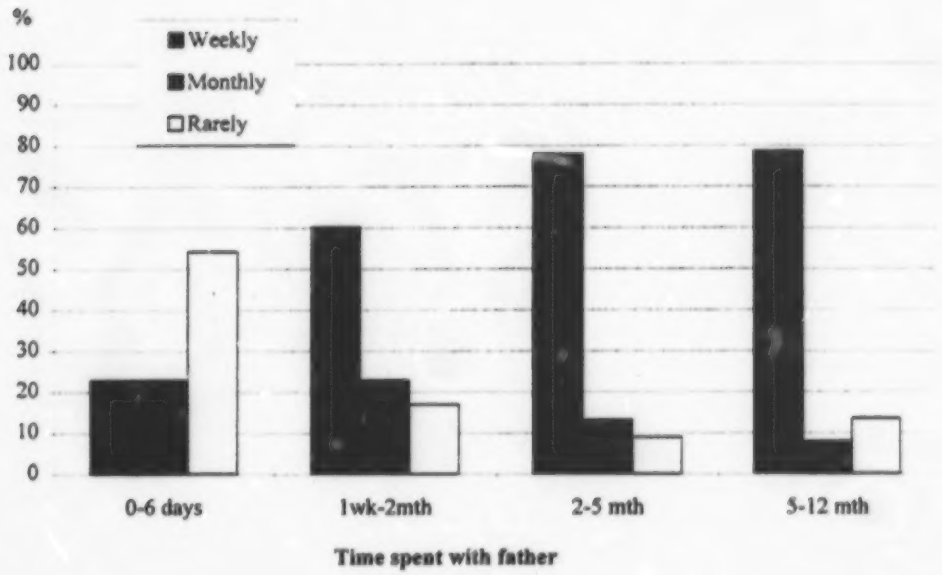
[b] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

A close look at Figure 1 clearly shows that contact by letter or telephone is far from being used as a substitute for visits by fathers who rarely see their children. The opposite situation seems to be the case: the less often fathers see their children, the less likely they are to communicate with them by letter or telephone. Almost 80 percent of children with frequent contact with their father (five months or more) communicate at least once a week with him by letter or telephone when living with their mother, compared with less than a quarter of children who scarcely ever see their father (less than one week). In fact, more than half the children who spent less than a week a year with their father were not even in contact by letter or telephone on a monthly basis. It is also of interest that children who rarely see their father but who have regular contact with him by letter or telephone do not appear to communicate in this way because of distance separating the parents' households. In almost half the cases, the children lived less than 10 kilometres from their father and very few lived more than 100 kilometres away (data not presented). It seems likely, therefore, that the variable constructed as an indicator of the frequency of father/child

[4] The number of children excluded from this analysis slightly exceeds the number classified in Table 3 as having spent 10-12 months with their father. This is because some children declared by their fathers to be living full time with them (and who were thus excluded from the question concerning letter and telephone contact) were reported as spending a considerable number of days with their mother during the previous year.

contact adequately represents the extent of the contact that separated fathers had with their children in the previous year.

Figure 1: Frequency of contact by letter or telephone according to time spent with father



As mentioned earlier, certain analyses will be based on the father rather than the child sample. As our aim is to characterise the fathers according to the degree of contact they had with their children, using the father sample raised the question of how to classify fathers who did not have the same level of contact with all their children? Of the 291 fathers of the children in the sample (see Table 1), 110 had more than one child; of these, 40 percent reported spending a different number of days with each child. In 60 percent of cases, the frequency of contact varies from one child to another even when the number of days is classified into four categories. How should a father's level of contact be best represented, therefore—should preference be given to the time spent with the oldest child, or with the youngest? After a detailed examination of the data, we concluded that calculating the average number of days spent by the father with his children produced the best overall measure of contact. The father was then classified into the appropriate group of the four-category father/child contact variable according to this estimated average number of days. A comparison of the two samples—fathers and children—distributed according to the time spent with the father, is presented in Table 5. It is interesting to note the similarity between the two series of percentages.

Table 5: Number of children and fathers according to the frequency of father/child contact

	Frequency of father/child contact				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
Number of children					
N[a]	98	95	98	127	418
%	23.4	22.8	23.4	30.4	100
Number of fathers					
N[a]	67	69	68	87	291
%	23.1	23.8	23.3	29.8	100

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

III. PROFILE OF FATHERS ACCORDING TO THE FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

A. CHILD-RELATED SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Using the child sample, this section explores various socio-demographic characteristics shown to be relevant to the analysis of father/child contact in North American and European research (for a review, see Cooksey and Craig, 1999). These include the child's age at the time of the survey and at the time of his or her parents' separation, the time elapsed since the separation, the type of parental union at the child's birth and a variety of factors regarding custody arrangements, including the father's satisfaction with these arrangements. Several of the variables were not directly available from the micro-data file on child data produced by Statistics Canada. In order to describe the parents' conjugal situation at the child's birth, for instance, or establish the age at parental separation, or the time passed since the separation, the birth of each child had first to be allocated to the appropriate union (if born within one); to do this, we had to combine the data in the child file with those in the union file.[5] Table 6 contains the results of the bi-variate analyses carried out using these variables.

A study of children's family histories, based on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), revealed a close link between the type of conjugal union into which a baby is born and the probability that this child subsequently experiences the breakdown of his parents' union (Marcil-Gratton, 1998). Thus, children born to cohabiting parents appear considerably more at risk of living through family disruption than those whose parents had married directly, even in Quebec where cohabitation is tending to replace marriage as the context for starting a family. One might, initially, have expected cohabiting fathers to be more likely to maintain a close relationship with their children after separation than more "traditionally" wed fathers, given the greater equality between partners observed among cohabiting couples (Le Bourdais and Sauriol, 1998; Shelton and John, 1993). However, our results reveal a different and more complex picture. A higher proportion (38.1 percent) of children whose parents married directly had frequent contact with their father (5 months and more) than those whose parents had cohabited at some point, whether or not they had subsequently married (30.0 percent and 25.2 percent); however, at the other end of the scale, children born to married parents (19.4 percent) are also a little more likely than the others (around 15 percent) to see their father rarely or not at all.

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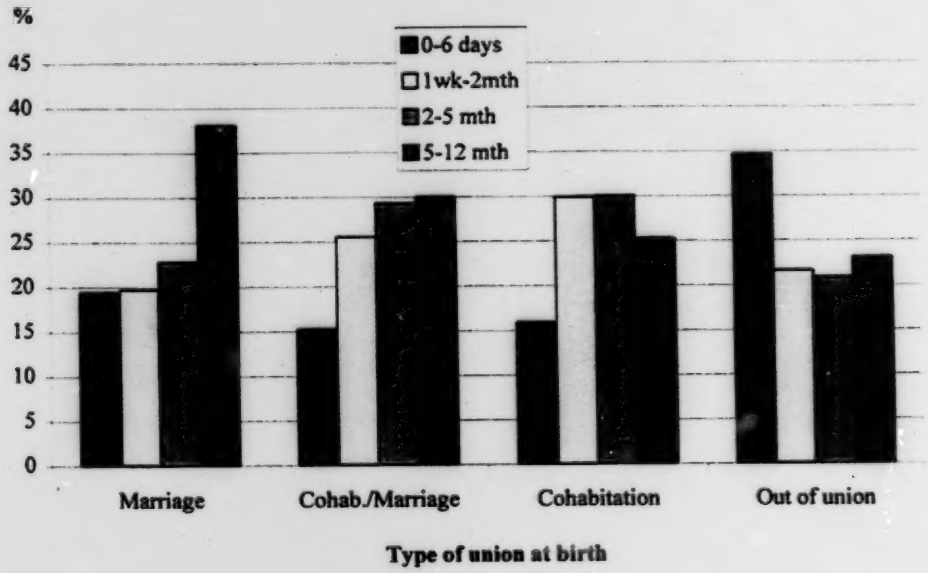
[5] For a more detailed account of the creation and content of the three GSS files (Main data file, Child File and Union File), see Statistics Canada, 1997.

Table 6: Distribution (%) of children 0-17 years, according to the time spent with their father, by various socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Time spent with the father: Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total	%
N[a]	98	95	98	127	418	
Type of union at the child's birth						
Direct marriage	19.4	19.7	22.8	38.1	100	42.4
Marriage preceded by cohabitation	15.2	25.5	29.3	30.0	100	18.9
Cohabitation	15.9	29.9	30.0	25.2	100	10.4
Birth out of union	34.6	21.6	20.8	23.0	100	28.3
$\chi^2 = 19.277$, $p = 0.023$, missing cases: 44						
Child's age at time of separation						
0-5 years	34.0	24.2	24.3	17.5	100	19.4
6-11 years	17.2	20.8	29.2	32.8	100	38.3
12-14 years	20.2	25.5	17.6	36.7	100	19.5
15-17 years	27.7	22.4	17.8	32.1	100	22.8
$\chi^2 = 18.925$, $p = 0.026$						
Child's age at time of separation						
0-1 years (includes children born out of union)	36.0	25.4	20.0	18.6	100	37.8
2-5 years	15.5	20.8	30.7	33.0	100	30.8
6-11 years	13.7	18.9	25.8	41.7	100	24.0
12-17 years	10.4	25.4	13.6	50.6	100	7.4
$\chi^2 = 38.497$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 44						
Time elapsed since separation						
Less than 2 years	17.5	18.5	19.3	44.7	100	18.1
2-4 years	13.0	24.5	24.9	37.6	100	28.8
5-9 years	24.4	20.0	32.0	23.6	100	36.3
10 years and over	39.7	28.3	11.5	20.5	100	16.8
$\chi^2 = 34.159$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 44						
Distance between the parents' domiciles						
Less than 10 km	18.3	11.2	26.0	44.5	100	33.6
10-49 km	15.2	26.3	30.1	28.4	100	25.9
50-399 km	19.0	32.5	28.7	19.8	100	19.0
400 km and more	38.5	29.6	8.3	23.6	100	21.5
$\chi^2 = 52.571$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 9						

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

Figure 2: Distribution of children according to type of union at birth and time spent with father



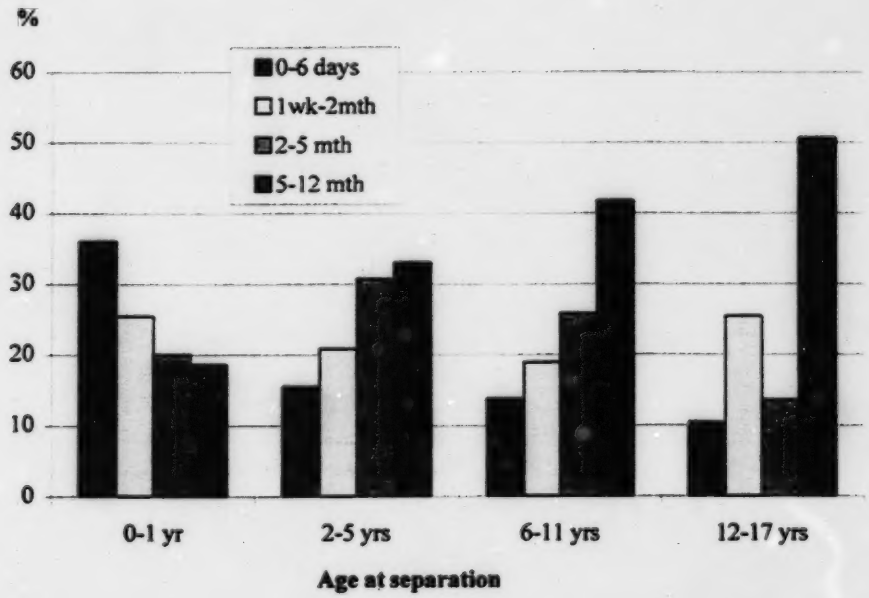
One might also expect more contact between fathers and children who had lived together long enough before the separation to establish a durable relationship. Consequently, we anticipated that children whose parents were not living together at their birth would have less frequent contact with their father than those born to married or cohabiting parents. Figure 2 shows this to be the case: children born outside a conjugal union are much more at risk of never seeing their father than those born within a union, with almost one-third of the former in this situation compared with less than one-fifth of the latter. Less predictable, perhaps, is the finding that almost a quarter (23.3 percent) of children born outside a union spent at least five months with their father in the year preceding the survey. This proportion is certainly over-estimated, however, because of higher rates of under-reporting among children born outside a union who have no contact with their fathers.

We next examined variations in father/child contact according to the age of children at the time of the survey. The children were allocated to one of four age groups, linked to important stages in their development: the preschool period (0-5 years); primary school age (6-11 years); and secondary school age, divided into two groups (12-14 years and 15-17 years) on the assumption that the growing importance of peer group relations during adolescence would translate, in the statistics, into a reduction in the time spent with the "other" parent.

Table 6 demonstrates that the youngest children spend the least time with their fathers: one-third (34.0 percent) of preschool children had seen him little or not at all in the 12 months before the survey—a proportion twice that observed among children of primary school age (17.2 percent).

At the other extreme, the proportions are inverted: almost twice the percentage of children aged 6-11 years spent at least five months with their father (32.8 percent compared with 17.5 percent among the youngest group). The children most likely to have frequent contact with their father are those aged 12 to 14 years, of whom more than one-third (36.7 percent) spent at least five months with their father during the previous year. Up to this point, our findings corroborate those of other research, showing that fathers have most regular contact with their older children (Seltzer, 1991). For adolescents aged 15 to 17 years, however, the image is a little less clear. Although the proportion of children spending a great deal of time with their father remains high, at slightly under one-third, over one-quarter have all but lost contact with him. These differences are no doubt linked to changes in behaviour during adolescence. Also partly responsible may be the fact that this age group includes both those children for whom the time elapsed since separation is the longest and those who were the oldest at the time of separation, two characteristics intimately associated with the number of father/child contacts.

Figure 3: Distribution of children according to age at separation and time spent with father



The child's age at separation provides a useful gauge of the length of time during which a father was able to develop a relationship with their children on a daily basis (see Figure 3). Once again, age groups were defined to correspond to periods of schooling. However, in this case the preschool age group was divided in two, in order to identify the children who had never lived with both parents, or those who were still very young at the time of separation. As expected, the proportion of children spending at least five months a year with their father increased steadily with the child's age at separation: half (50.6 percent) of the children aged 12 years and over when their parents separated lived at least five months a year with their father, compared with

less than one-fifth (18.6 percent) of children aged under two years. The latter were three and a half times more likely to have little or no contact with their father (36.0 percent as against 10.4 percent), a result undoubtedly linked to the fact that the group of children aged under two years at the separation includes, by definition, children born outside a union.

Research on father/child contact reveals that fathers have a tendency, over time, to gradually lose contact with their children. Our findings are entirely consistent with this. As can be seen in Table 6, the more recent the separation, the more time fathers and children spend together: a little under half (44.7 percent) the children experiencing parental separation within the two years preceding the survey stayed with their father at least five months a year, compared with less than a quarter of children whose parents had been separated for five years or more.

These last three variables are obviously closely related to one another. Children who were very young at the time of the survey, for example, experienced their parents' separation at a very early age and are necessarily included in the group of children for whom the time since separation is short. In the third phase of this research, we attempt to assess the relative impact of each of these characteristics on the degree of father/child contact by applying a multivariate analysis to the data.

The geographic distance separating the households of the two parents is a key factor in the continuation of father/child contact. Geographic proximity facilitates enormously the movement of children from one parent's home to the other and, without this proximity, joint custody is virtually inconceivable, given the problems of organising schooling and social life. As foreseen, the shorter the distance between the two residences, the more frequent the contact between fathers and children. Thus, the proportion (44.5 percent) of children maintaining a close relationship with their father is significantly higher when their parents' homes are less than 10 kilometres apart.

B. FAMILY AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FATHERS

This section explores the level of father/child contact in relation to the fathers' conjugal and family situation at the time of the survey and to a number of their socio-economic characteristics. This analysis is based on the father sample, as is the investigation of perceptions and attitudes in the following section.

Fathers' conjugal and family situation

The conjugal and parental trajectory chosen by parents after a separation is likely to modify the relationship they have with their children. Choosing to form a union with a new spouse, to live with that spouse's children, to have other children within that union, or to separate once again, are decisions that will probably influence the time and financial support that separated parents are able to offer their children. An earlier study demonstrated that the frequency of father/child contact decreased with the father's remarriage (Seltzer et al., 1989). A more recent study, however, showed how important it is to take into account the presence of children in the father's new family when examining the impact of the conjugal situation. Once the presence of children was controlled for in this study, remarried fathers actually appeared more disposed to see their children regularly than cohabiting or single (i.e. those living alone and never having married)

fathers; moreover, while the birth of children within the new union led to a lower level of father/child contact, the presence in the household of the new spouse's children had no apparent effect (Cooksey and Craig, 1999). The impact of these events, therefore, is likely to be considerable and may vary according to the moment in time that they occur.

The GSS data enable us to describe the family situation of the responding parent at the time of the survey; they also permit the reconstruction of the conjugal and parental trajectories taken by respondents after the separation. As a first step, we categorised separated fathers according to whether or not they were living with a new partner at the time of the survey. For those without a partner at the time of the survey, we then established whether they had formed a new union at some point after the separation. Fathers living in a couple at the time of the survey were further classified according to whether this new household included children other than those from the earlier union—either children of the new partner, or those born within the current union. We traced the conjugal and parental history of fathers in this way from the breakdown of the union in which the youngest child in the sample was born; 29 fathers for whom the necessary information was unavailable were excluded from the analysis.

Table 7: Distribution (%) of fathers[a] of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and by the fathers' conjugal and parental trajectory

Family situation at time of survey	Time spent with the children: Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total	%
N[b]	59	64	61	78	262	
Without a partner:						
- no subsequent union	25.8	20.3	22.6	31.3	100	45.4
- lived in a new union[c]	11.2	33.3	23.3	32.2	100	12.9
With a partner:						
- without other children present	11.8	35.0	25.8	27.6	100	21.6
- with other children present	34.5	15.9	23.7	25.9	100	20.1

$\chi^2 = 15.417$, $p = 0.080$, missing cases: 3

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

[a] The father's family history, from the moment he no longer lived with the mother of the youngest child in the sample, was estimated only if the data was sufficiently complete to allow us to situate the child's birth correctly in the father's family trajectory (for 271 of the 291 fathers).

[b] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

[c] In 3 cases, the father had lived with a new partner and her children from a previous union.

Between the time of separation (or the birth of a child born outside a union) and the survey, more than half the separated fathers had experienced at least one subsequent family relationship: 54.8 percent had formed a new union; 13.6 percent had lived with the children of a new partner; and 12.0 percent had fathered another child within a new union (data not presented).

At the time of the survey, over half the fathers were not living in a couple (see Table 7); of these, however, almost one in five had lived with a new partner between the time of separation and the survey (12.9 percent of 58.3 percent). Two-thirds of the fathers living in a couple at the time of

the survey reported that they were cohabiting,[6] and only one-third had remarried (data not presented). Almost half the fathers living with a new partner (20.1 percent of 41.7 percent) stated that they were also living with children other than those from their previous union; around half the children in question were those of their new partner, and the other half were children born within the new union. Only 2 percent of fathers reported living with both their partner's children and with children born within the new union.

Contrary to our expectations, the frequency of father/child contact did not appear a priori to be significantly linked to the conjugal or family situation of fathers at the time of the survey. The absence of a statistical relationship is certainly due, in part, to the small sample size, but it may also result from the sample bias, which over-represents fathers who see their children regularly and which may well be related to the fathers' current family situation.

Fathers' socio-economic characteristics

The GSS provides a number of indicators of the respondents' socio-economic situation at the time of the survey. In Table 8, the distribution of fathers with regard to a number of these measures is presented, according to the average time spent with their children.

Table 8: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and by certain economic characteristics of the father

	Time spent with the child					
Father's economic characteristics	**Less than 1 week**	**1 week to 2 months**	**2 to 5 months**	**5 months and over**	**Total**	**%**
N*	67	69	68	87	291	
Highest level of education						
Primary and part of secondary	28.2	24.9	17.5	29.4	100	24.7
Secondary	10.7	31.4	24.5	33.4	100	15.6
Post-secondary	23.6	20.4	28.8	27.2	100	38.3
University	27.2	24.0	21.3	27.5	100	21.4
$\chi^2 = 8.668$, $p = 0.468$, missing cases: 6						
Total income for the 12 months preceding the survey						
Less than $20,000	31.8	25.6	15.0	27.6	100	24.9
$20,000 – $29,999	7.6	37.1	17.1	38.2	100	22.3
$30,000 – $49,999	30.9	18.7	29.6	20.8	100	28.5
$50,000 and over	4.1	17.2	37.4	41.3	100	24.3
$\chi^2 = 36.876$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 65						
Main activity in the 12 months preceding the survey						
Employed	23.2	20.6	26.4	29.8	100	79.9
Looking for work	30.4	26.7	13.2	29.7	100	9.8
Other	18.4	46.4	12.1	23.1	100	10.3
$\chi^2 = 12.404$, $p = 0.054$, missing cases: 5						

[6] Two fathers reported that they were cohabiting with a male partner.

Table 8: (cont'd)

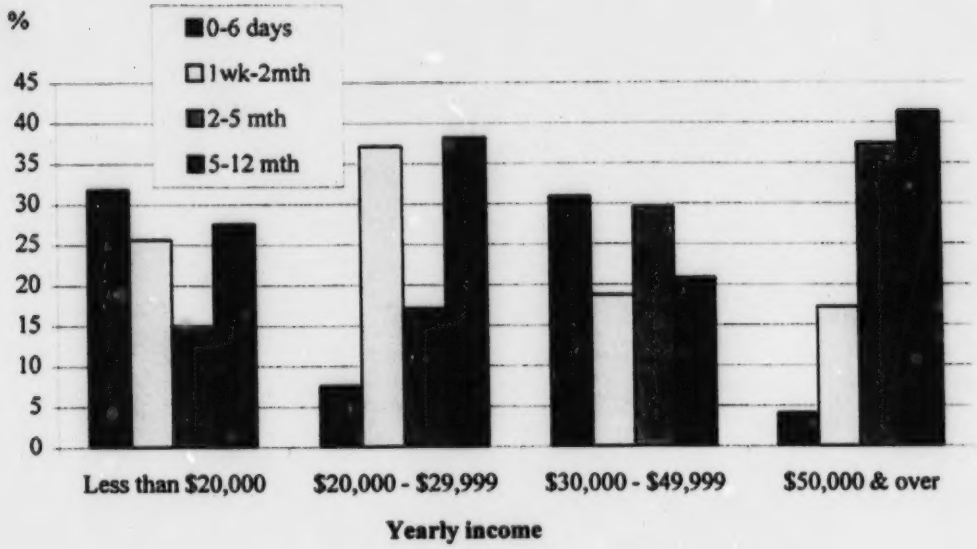
Father's economic characteristics	Time spent with the child: Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total	%
Number of weeks worked during the 12 months preceding the survey[b]						
32 weeks or more	23.2	19.8	27.7	29.3	100	83.7
Less than 32 weeks	29.7	33.4	17.6	19.3	100	16.3
$\chi^2 = 6.355$, $p = 0.096$, missing cases: 1						
Worked evenings, nights or weekends on a regular basis[b]						
Yes	25.7	24.4	22.6	27.3	100	61.3
No	22.0	18.2	31.5	28.3	100	38.7
$\chi^2 = 3.436$, $p = 0.329$						

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.
[b] Among the 267 fathers who were employed at some point during the 12 months preceding the survey.

Overall, almost a quarter of separated fathers did not graduate from high school, while a proportion only slightly lower had completed a university education. Similarly, a quarter of fathers had a personal income of less than $20,000 during the year preceding the survey and a comparable proportion had an annual income of $50,000 or more. During the same period, four fathers in five reported paid employment as their principal activity. Among the 20 percent of unemployed fathers, half were looking for work and the other half reported a variety of principal activities (studies, running the household or chronic illness). Finally, for fathers who were employed or self-employed at some point during the 12 months preceding the survey, the vast majority worked at least 32 weeks, and almost two-thirds (61.3 percent) reported working evenings, nights or weekends on a regular basis. It is difficult to judge to what point our sample is representative of separated fathers as a whole concerning their socio-economic characteristics. We can assume, however, as results of a recent American study imply, that the fathers contacted by the 1995 GSS have a somewhat higher than average socio-economic status (Lin *et al.*, 1998).

One might expect fathers' socio-economic characteristics, and their working hours in particular, to be linked to the frequency of contact with their children. However, the analysis of GSS data reveals only a slender association between the variables. In fact, when these socio-economic characteristics are examined in relation to the average time spent with children, neither the level of education, nor the fact of being employed, working normal hours on a regular basis, appear to be linked in any significant way to the frequency of father/child contact (see Figure 4). Only income seems to influence the amount of contact in any significant way. Among fathers enjoying a personal annual income of $50,000 or more, 40 percent reported maintaining a close relationship with their children, and only 4 percent declared that they almost never saw them. This latter figure contrasts strongly with the much higher fraction (31.8 percent) of fathers in the lowest income group (less than $20,000 a year) who had little or no contact with their children. This result lends support to the hypothesis advanced in other research (Seltzer, 1994) indicating that fathers who are unable to meet their financial obligations tend to cut off links with their children.

Figure 4: Distribution of fathers according to yearly income and time spent with children



C. FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSE ASPECTS OF CONJUGAL AND FAMILY LIFE

The GSS collected information on respondents' perceptions of several aspects of conjugal and family life. Separated fathers' attitudes towards certain facets of the paternal role are presented in Table 9, their stance on masculine and feminine roles in Table 10, and their perception of personal happiness in Table 11.

For each of the perception and attitude questions, respondents were asked to select one of four replies, according to whether they "strongly agreed," "agreed," "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement put to them.[7] The micro-data file produced by Statistics Canada also contains an additional category for respondents with "no opinion" on the subject. In the case of variables where one or other of the extreme categories contained only a small number of fathers, responses were grouped according to the number of replies. Moreover, the small number of fathers with "no opinion" on any given question were normally treated as missing and excluded from the analysis.

Fathers' responses to these questions were examined in relation to the frequency of contact they had with their children. Our aim, in other words, was to discover whether the perceptions and attitudes of fathers with little or no contact with their children differed in any way from those of fathers who had remained in close contact with them. This analysis is an exploratory one, and

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[7] To the question about the effect of the separation on the father/child relationship, respondents were asked to evaluate whether it had been "very positive," "positive," "negative" or "very negative".

does not enable us to explain the behaviour of fathers on the issue of contact with their children based on their perception of diverse aspects of family life, at the time of the survey; these perceptions can as easily be the result as the cause of the observed behaviour. It can nevertheless provide several suggestions for interpreting the observed results. In the context of this analysis, it must be kept in mind that the amount of time fathers spend with their children does not depend entirely on their own wishes; several other factors, not taken into consideration here, can facilitate or thwart the father's relationship with his offspring when he does not live with their mother.

Fathers' perceptions of the paternal role

Fathers who had their children within a union were asked about the impact of the divorce or separation on the relationship with their children. Fathers with children from different unions had to reply to this question for each previous union. The following analysis refers only to the union in which the youngest child in the sample was born. In other words, unions that broke down before the last child's birth are not taken into consideration; and fathers who had never lived in a couple have also been excluded.

Table 9: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and their perception of various aspects of the paternal role

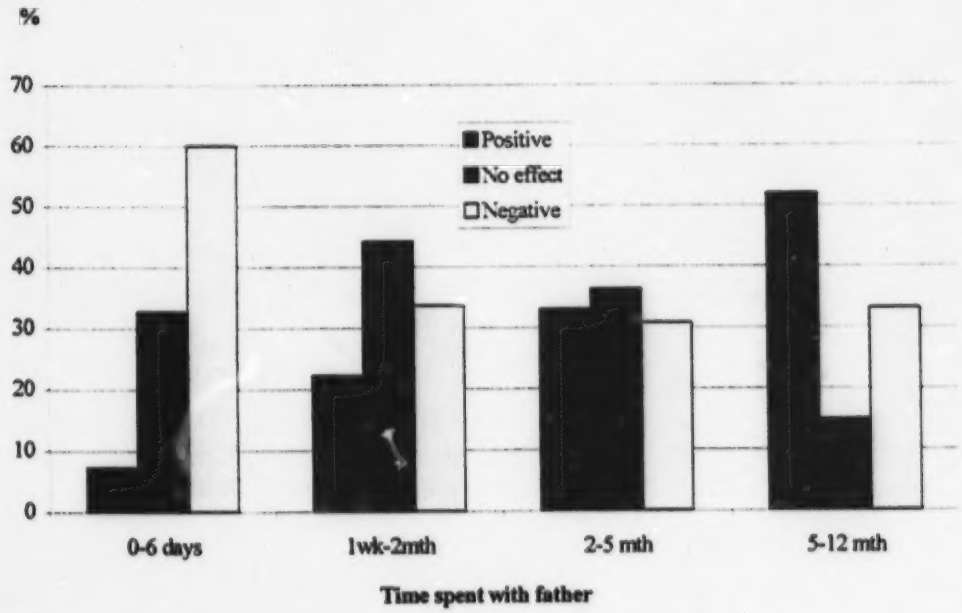
	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	%
N[a]	67	69	68	87	291
Effect of the separation/divorce on father's relationship with the children[b]					
Positive	7.3	22.2	33.0	52.0	32.0
No effect	32.7	44.2	36.3	14.9	30.8
Negative	49.2	17.2	2.6	7.7	16.1
Very negative	10.8	16.4	28.1	25.4	21.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 48.466$, p = 0.001, missing cases: 21 (in addition to those not applicable)					
During childhood, the father very close emotionally to his own father					
Yes	59.7	52.0	66.8	59.0	59.2
No	40.3	48.0	33.2	41.0	40.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 2.975$, p =0.395, missing cases: 17					
Respondent thinks he is a better father than his own father was					
Yes	53.4	46.4	60.4	72.7	59.1
No	46.6	53.6	39.6	27.3	40.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 10.114$, p = 0.018, missing cases: 40					
Level of satisfaction with the amount of time spent generally with the children					
Very satisfied	19.2	17.0	17.8	40.5	24.6
Satisfied	26.2	40.5	53.1	47.5	42.2
Dissatisfied	54.6	42.5	29.1	12.0	33.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 41.626$, p = 0.001, missing cases: 5					

Table 9: (cont'd)

	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	%
If the respondent could live his life over, he would not have had children					
Agree	10.2	7.5	4.8	3.1	6.2
Disagree	61.9	64.1	56.1	47.4	56.7
Strongly disagree	27.9	28.4	39.1	49.5	37.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 12.042$, $p = 0.061$, missing cases: 9					
Having children made the respondent a happier person					
Strongly agree	30.3	28.1	45.6	45.4	37.9
Agree	54.8	53.7	47.2	53.0	52.2
Disagree	14.9	18.2	7.2	1.6	9.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 18.115$, $p = 0.006$, missing cases: 6					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.
[b] Information not presented for 79 fathers of children born out of union and for 29 fathers for whom it was impossible to ascertain whether the children were born within or outside of a union.

Figure 5: Effect of divorce on relationship with children according to time spent with them



Overall, fathers were almost equally distributed (approximately one-third) in their perception that the union breakdown had had a positive effect, no effect or a more or less negative effect on their relationship with their children (see Table 9). However, as is clear from Figure 5, their perception of the effect differed significantly according to the amount of time spent with the children. Around 60 percent (49.2 percent + 10.8 percent) of fathers with little or no contact with their children judged that the divorce had had a negative or very negative impact—almost twice that observed for the other three groups of fathers (around 30 percent). Just over half (52.0 percent) of the fathers in the highest contact group considered that the separation had in fact improved their relationship with their children; a quarter of these fathers, nonetheless, judged that the impact of separation or divorce had been very negative. For the former, the union breakdown appears to have brought them closer to their children; for the latter, one must assume that the separation had the opposite effect, perhaps by reducing the frequency of contact for these fathers who had a close relationship with their children from the start.

Whether or not separated fathers felt close to their own father during childhood does not seem to have any significant impact on the degree of contact they maintained with their children; in fact, approximately the same proportion (59 percent) of fathers felt close to their fathers in both the "no contact" and the "close contact" groups.

Overall, almost six men in 10 agreed with the statement that they were better fathers than their own father had been. However, the proportion varies significantly according to the degree of father/child contact. Almost three-quarters (72.7 percent) of fathers who spent at least five months with their children felt they were better fathers than their own had been. This may be because, when the children are with them, they participate fully in the daily organisation of their children's lives, while their own fathers, remaining married to the mother of their children, left running the household entirely to her. Less easy to explain, however, is the fact that more than half the fathers with little or no contact with their children also saw themselves as better than their own fathers had been. Perhaps in this case we are dealing with fathers who were quite close to their children, but who had to put an end to these relationships, at least temporarily, after a breakup that they experienced as a painful separation distancing them from their children (Quéniart, 1999).

The satisfaction expressed by fathers with the time they spent in general with their children is closely linked to the frequency of contact they have with them. Almost nine fathers in 10 (88.0 percent) of those who spent at least five months with their children were satisfied with the situation, and four out of 10 were very satisfied. At the other extreme, more than half (54.6 percent) of fathers with little or no contact are dissatisfied with the time they spend with their children.

Despite the problems, fathers did not appear to regret having had children. Only one in 16 stated that, if he could start over again, he would not have a child. Fathers with the closest contact were the most certain of their choice: almost half (49.5 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement that if they could begin again they would not have had children, and only 3.1 percent were in agreement. In contrast, among fathers with scarcely any contact, one in ten regretted the decision, and only 27.9 percent completely disagreed with the idea that they would not have had children. Nine out of ten fathers declared that having children made them happier. The degree of agreement with this statement varies, however, according to the amount of father/child

contact. The more fathers saw their children, the more they declared themselves very much in agreement with the statement that having children made them happier (45 percent among fathers spending at least 5 months with children, compared with 30.3 percent among those with little or no contact); at the other extreme, the less they saw their children, the more they disagreed with the statement (14.9 percent versus 1.6 percent).

Fathers' perceptions of masculine and feminine roles

The GSS collected information on the respondents' perception of male and female roles today. For this, respondents had to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements such as: "Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person;" "A man should refuse a promotion at work if it means spending too little time with his family." Table 10 contains the fathers' responses to these questions according to the time spent with their children.

Table 10: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and according to their perception of feminine and masculine roles

% of fathers who agree or disagree with the following statements	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	%
N*	67	69	68	87	291
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent					
Agree	68.0	56.6	57.6	68.5	63.0
Disagree	32.0	43.4	42.4	31.5	37.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 3.574$, $p = 0.311$, missing cases: 26					
Both the man and the woman should contribute to the household income					
Strongly agree	3.5	15.3	12.8	13.9	11.6
Agree	81.4	59.1	58.3	65.7	65.9
Disagree	15.1	25.6	28.9	20.4	22.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 10.961$, $p = 0.090$, missing cases: 25					
A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children					
Agree	59.9	49.8	47.6	59.4	54.6
Disagree	40.1	50.2	52.4	40.6	45.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 3.064$, $p = 0.382$, missing cases: 37					
The everyday tasks of raising children are not primarily a man's responsibility					
Agree	17.2	4.1	1.8	1.5	5.7
Disagree	65.2	69.9	55.9	54.7	61.0
Strongly disagree	17.6	26.0	42.3	43.8	33.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 31.151$, $p = 0.001$; missing cases: 9					

Table 10: (cont'd)

% of fathers who agree or disagree with the following statements	Time spent with the child: Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	%
If a man brings enough money home so his wife and children have a comfortable life, he has fulfilled his role as a husband and a parent					
Agree	38.0	19.6	22.6	25.8	26.2
Disagree	51.2	63.5	55.7	60.5	58.0
Strongly disagree	10.8	16.9	21.7	13.7	15.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 8.656$, $p = 0.194$, missing cases: 6					
A man should refuse a promotion at work if it means spending too little time with his family					
Agree	55.3	52.6	53.0	55.1	54.0
Disagree	44.7	47.4	47.0	44.9	46.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 0.145$, $p = 0.986$, missing cases: 40					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

In contrast to the questions in the preceding section, which refer to the individual circumstances of fathers, the questions on male and female roles are of a more general nature and do not involve personal experience. In some cases, replies to these questions may be a better reflection of the image society projects than of their personal convictions. The difference in the formulation of the questions has without doubt caused the lack of variation observed in this second series of analyses, that is, the absence of a significant association between the opinions expressed by fathers on masculine and feminine roles and the degree of father/child contact.

Only the statement that "the everyday tasks of raising children are not primarily a man's responsibility" appears to discriminate between fathers in terms of the time spent with children: fathers with little or no contact were much more likely to declare themselves in agreement with this proposition than fathers spending two months or more with them (17.2 percent compared with less than 2 percent), and a smaller proportion expressed strong disagreement. This question is evidently the one in this group that relates most directly to men's personal lives.

Fathers' attitudes towards happiness

Table 11 presents our findings on the attitudes fathers hold concerning their personal happiness. Overall, nine out of ten men considered a lasting relationship to be important or very important for being happy in life, although just over half felt that marriage was important. Only three-quarters of fathers, however, thought that having a child was important for their personal happiness, while almost a quarter declared it unimportant. The breakdown by level of father/child contact immediately confirms what earlier analyses predicted—that the contact fathers maintain with their children is more obviously linked to their attitudes about father/child relations than about male/female issues.

Table 11: Distribution (%) of fathers of children aged 0-17 years according to the average time spent with the children and according to their attitudes towards happiness

% of fathers who, to be happy in life, consider it important or unimportant...	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	%
N[a]	67	69	68	87	291
...to have a lasting relationship as a couple					
Very important	57.6	37.9	50.9	46.6	48.1
Important	31.6	50.1	40.7	44.2	41.9
Not important	10.8	12.0	8.3	9.2	10.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 6.416$, $p = 0.378$, missing cases: 2					
...to be married					
Very important	22.9	16.7	20.3	18.7	19.6
Important	38.0	29.4	30.0	27.0	30.8
Not important	39.1	53.9	49.7	54.3	49.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 4.499$, $p = 0.609$, missing cases: 1					
...to have at least one child					
Very important	24.8	19.8	24.7	37.5	27.3
Important	55.0	47.0	44.7	47.9	48.6
Not important	20.2	33.2	30.6	14.6	24.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 12.964$, $p = 0.044$, missing cases: 2					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

The two questions on the importance of conjugal life for men's happiness do not appear to be closely linked to the level of father/child contact. In contrast, attitudes towards having a child appear to be significantly linked to the frequency of contact, though not always in the way one might have predicted. Fathers with close links to their children were the most inclined (37.5 percent) to consider having a child to be very important for happiness in life, and the least likely (14.6 percent) to attach no importance to it. In the two intermediate contact categories, the proportion of fathers who recognised the very positive effect of children decreased as the time spent with children declined, while the percentage not giving them any importance increased. Following this line of thought, we would have expected fathers with little or no contact with their children to be the least likely to attach great importance to children and, inversely, to be the most prone to attribute little value to them. However, the situation is somewhat different. This may be because, as certain studies have shown, this category includes both fathers who have never been close to their children and those who cut the close links they had had with their children after separation. (Quéniart, 1999)

IV. FATHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AFTER SEPARATION: FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' EXPECTATIONS

In this section, our objective is to compare the expectations of separated fathers and mothers concerning their children's care and their degree of satisfaction with arrangements in place at the time of the survey. Although the fathers and mothers contacted by the GSS did not provide information on the same children, we wished to explore the extent to which separated mothers and fathers express similar opinions with regard to custody arrangements, the amount of contact and children's financial support. Are mothers more or less satisfied than fathers with the degree of contact, for example, when fathers rarely or never see their children? Our aim, in other words, is to ascertain whether the level of satisfaction, for any given frequency of contact, varies according to the sex of the responding parent.

A. DATA LIMITATIONS

Before starting this analysis, it is important to come back to the difference between male and female separated parents in terms of reliability in reporting children, as this difference had an impact on the results. As we discussed during the presentation of the 1995 General Social Survey on the Family in section (II.A), separated fathers tend to under-declare the children from past relationships, particularly when they had little contact with them. There is clear evidence of the problem of under-declaration in Table 12. While similar numbers of children spending five months or more with their father were reported, irrespective of the sex of the responding parent (127 by fathers compared with 113 by mothers), almost twice as many children with little or no contact with the father were declared when mothers, rather than fathers, replied to the survey (231 versus 98).

A second element shows up as clearly in the findings presented in Table 12: providing full time care to children after separation is the affair of women rather than men, even with the bias in our sample that overestimates the time fathers spend with children. Thus, while fathers reported only one child out of six (67 in 418) living full time with them, this was the case for 85 percent of children declared by mothers (576 out of 676). This fact has important consequences for our analysis, as the complexity of the pathways followed in the GSS questionnaire meant that certain questions were not asked about children reported to be living full time with the respondent.

Table 12: Numbers of children included in the analysis of certain variables concerning custody arrangements, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father

	Time spent with the father									
	Children reported by their father					Children reported by their mother				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
Total number of children*	98	95	98	127	418	231	194	138	113	676
Exclusions										
1-Children reported living full-time with the respondent	-0	-3	-3	-61	-67	-219	-190	-131	-36	-576
Number remaining	98	92	95	66	351	12	4	8	77	100
2-Children living 365 days with the other parent	-81	-0	-0	-0	-81	-0	-0	-0	-14	-14
Number remaining	17	92	95	66	337	231	194	138	99	662

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
* Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

The only questions asked for every biological child reported by separated mothers and fathers were those regarding the respondents' level of satisfaction with the custody arrangements. For the other aspects of child care arrangements, information is only available for children who spent some part of the year with each of their separated parents. In many cases, there is very little interest in comparing statements made by fathers and mothers who do not have full-time custody of their children, given that the information is only available for the 15 percent of children reported by women to be living with them on a part-time basis.

For example, for children declared to be living full-time with the respondent, we have no information on the respondent's opinion concerning their contribution to the child's financial needs or their level of satisfaction with the amount of time spent with their child; this lack of information affects 67 children declared by fathers, and 576 children reported by mothers, to be living with the respondent full-time (see Table 12). Likewise, for children declared to be living on a full-time basis with the "other parent," no information is available on the respondents' opinion concerning the financial contribution of, and contact with, the other parent; this is the situation for 81 children declared by fathers, but only 14 by mothers.

An additional factor affects the comparison of male and female opinions regarding the fathers' financial contribution to their children's upkeep. As respondents, only fathers who reported making a contribution were asked to state whether or not they were satisfied with this contribution; mothers, on the other hand, expressed their satisfaction with the father's financial support whether or not the latter had provided any.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, it is possible to perform a number of interesting analyses using data from the 1995 GSS on the Family, as long as the sample is carefully selected and clearly delineated. First, we can compare the level of satisfaction with custody arrangements (where and with whom the child lives), as this question was asked for each child. Second, comparing the level of satisfaction expressed by mothers and fathers with the time fathers spent with their children presents no real problem. Fathers responded to this question for all children except those living full-time with them; likewise, mothers gave their opinion on the subject except for children they declared to be living full-time with their father. The two questions therefore cover comparable populations; the only limitation is that we have no information on the opinion of parents (mothers and fathers) when children live full time with their father. Finally, it is possible to compare the level of satisfaction of men and women with the financial contribution made by fathers, as long as the comparison is restricted to children for whom fathers make a contribution; children reported by mothers as receiving no financial support were thus excluded from this analysis.

B. SATISFACTION WITH CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS

Where and with whom the child lives

Custody arrangements did not appear to cause great problems for the vast majority of separated fathers and mothers contacted by the survey: fathers declared themselves satisfied with the place and with whom the children lived 78.6 percent of the time, and the proportion satisfied reached 94.0 percent for the mothers (see Table 13). Nonetheless, fathers were four times as likely as mothers to be dissatisfied with custody arrangements (18.4 percent versus 4.5 percent).

Among male respondents, the association between the frequency of contact with children and the level of satisfaction was marked: the more frequent the contact, the greater the satisfaction. Fathers declared themselves satisfied with the custody arrangements for almost nine out of ten (88.3 percent) children who had spent at least five months with them in the previous year, compared with only seven out of ten when they spent less than two months with their child; it is worth noting, however, that the fathers who rarely saw their children had no opinion on the subject more often than the others. A more detailed examination of the data (not presented here) showed that, at one extreme, fathers were satisfied in 95 percent of cases when children lived more than half the year with them and, at the other, expressed dissatisfaction over the arrangements of one in three children with whom they had had no contact at all during the year before the survey.

Table 13: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to the level of satisfaction of fathers and mothers with 1) the child's living arrangements and 2) the amount of father/child contact, by the time spent with the father

	Time spent with the child				
Level of satisfaction	Less than a week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
1) Living arrangements					
Father[b]					
- Satisfied	70.1	69.5	83.2	88.3	78.6
- Dissatisfied	20.7	27.7	15.7	11.7	18.4
- No opinion	9.2	2.8	1.1	-	3.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N[c]	95	95	98	127	415
$\chi^2 = 29.088$, p = 0.001, missing cases: 3					
Mother[b]					
- Satisfied	93.9	97.4	95.4	86.6	94.0
- Dissatisfied	3.7	1.9	4.4	10.6	4.5
- No opinion	2.4	0.7	0.2	2.8	1.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N[c]	228	194	138	113	673
$\chi^2 = 18.705$, p = 0.005, missing cases: 3					

Table 13: (cont'd)

Level of satisfaction	Time spent with the child: Less than a week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
2) The frequency of father/child contact[d]					
Father					
- Satisfied	39.0	62.3	76.9	81.6	63.6
- Dissatisfied	53.3	37.7	23.1	18.4	34.3
- No opinion	7.7	-	-	-	2.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N[c]	95	92	95	66	348
$\chi^2 = 53.043$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 3					
Mother					
- Satisfied	47.8	63.5	81.9	87.3	65.6
- Dissatisfied	47.0	33.8	16.5	10.0	31.1
- No opinion	5.2	2.7	1.6	2.7	[illegible]
Total	100	100	100	100	[illegible]
N[c]	226	194	138	98	656
$\chi^2 = 69.921$; $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 6					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

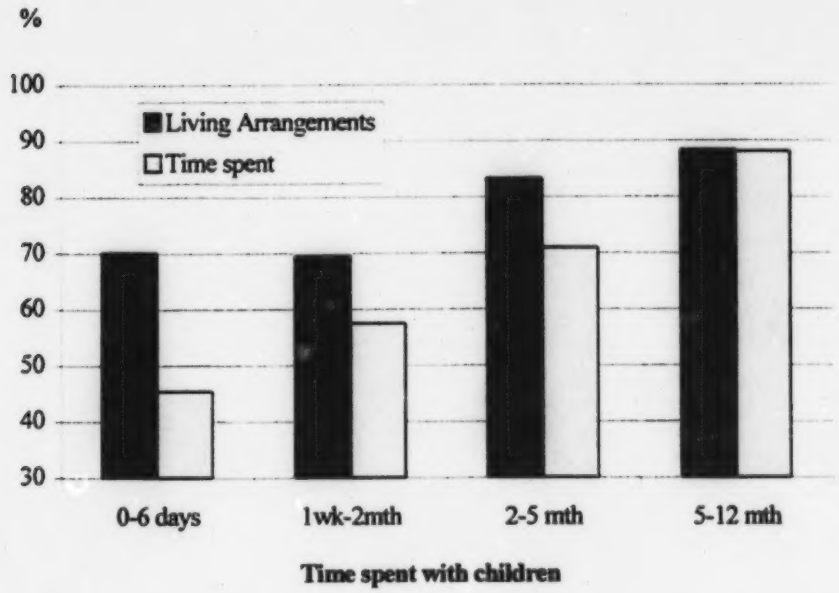
[a] For each contact category, except 5 months and over, the difference between the satisfaction levels of father and mothers is significant at 0.01.

[b] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

[c] Question asked only for children not living full-time with their father: 351 children reported by fathers; 662 by mothers.

The portrait that emerged from the information provided by mothers is less transparent. On the one hand, mothers declared themselves to be more often satisfied with the existing situation than were fathers when children were with them most of the year (that is, when they spent less than five months with their father); on the other hand, with regard to the custody arrangements of children spending at least five months with their father, 10.6 percent were dissatisfied, three times more than when children spent almost no time with the father. An examination of detailed data (not presented) showed nonetheless that women were very satisfied when their children lived full-time with their father; far less happy with the situation are those whose children spent the majority (but not all) of the year with him. It may be that mothers find it easier to adapt to a situation clearly defined at the outset than to one open to continual renegotiation.

Figure 6: Proportion of fathers satisfied with children's living arrangements and time spent with them



Overall, men declared themselves dissatisfied with custody for 74 children, and women, for 18 children (data not presented). In other words, as Figure 6 clearly illustrates, fathers expressed dissatisfaction more often than mothers did. A variety of reasons were offered for this lack of satisfaction. Men with low levels of contact wished to spend more time with their children, and those with more regular contact expressed the desire for legal custody. Replies to this question fell into the "other reason" category in about half the cases for male respondents, and in more than 60 percent of cases among female respondents; this category comprises a variety of responses linked to the child's life with the other parent, and amounts effectively to an inventory of "criticisms" of the way the other parent carries out his parental role (lifestyle, presence of a new partner, physical environment, lack of affection or discipline, etc.).

Frequency of father/child contact

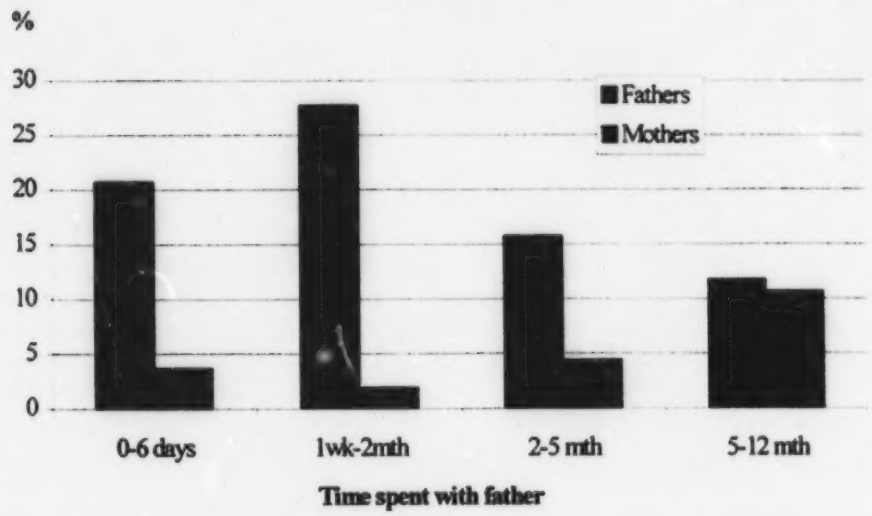
Mothers and fathers expressed considerably lower levels of satisfaction when the question made specific reference to the number of contacts between fathers and children (see the second section of Table 13). For around one-third of children, both men (34.3 percent) and women (31.1 percent) asserted a level of dissatisfaction with the frequency of father/child contact. In both cases, the lack of satisfaction appeared most often when fathers spent little or no time with their children during the year preceding the survey: around half the fathers (53.3 percent) and mothers (47.0 percent) were dissatisfied with the frequency of contact. Satisfaction increased as the amount of father/child contact increased, for both male and female respondents. The sample bias played a part in the observed similarity between men and women; the pathways followed in

the questionnaire meant that children living full-time with their father were excluded from the analysis, thus making more comparable the samples of children declared by fathers and mothers.

What reasons were offered to justify the lack of satisfaction? The great majority of men (85.6 percent) declared that they would have liked more frequent contact with their children; almost as many women complained that father/child contact was absent or too limited.

What stands out from the preceding analysis is the fact that fathers, while relatively satisfied with the place and person with whom the child lived, complain nonetheless of spending too little time with their children. It appears, in other words, that fathers do not so much want custody of their children as simply a more frequent access to them (see Figure 7); in such circumstances, they might be tempted to blame the mother for preventing them seeing their children. For their part, almost all mothers are satisfied with the custody arrangements, but they too would like fathers to have more frequent contact with their children; in this case, the father's lack of interest in his children might well become the focus for criticism.

Figure 7: Proportion of mothers and fathers dissatisfied with their children's living arrangements according to time spent with the father



C. FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO CHILDREN'S UPKEEP

Over and above the absence of any information on the financial support offered by fathers for particular groups of children, the vagueness of the question itself makes it a difficult subject to analyze. The following question was put to the responding parents: "Do you provide financial support for your child?" A similar question was also asked on the support offered by the other parent. Certain respondents appear to have interpreted these questions as applying strictly to support payments, while others adopted a much wider interpretation. Consequently, it is unclear whether the financial support declared by fathers living several months a year with their children concerns support payments made to the mother or if it refers to the costs assumed by the father when the child is in his care. Interpreting the information becomes more difficult as the level of father/child contact increases. A certain number of fathers, for example, reported that they provided no financial support for a child who had spent at least five months with them during the year before the survey; these fathers probably interpreted the question as referring to child support payments. For those who declared that they had provided financial support, there is no way of knowing whether or not this included support payments to the child's mother.

It is important to recall at this point that the reliable declaration of children by fathers is closely linked to the provision of financial support; men are more likely to report the existence of children they see regularly and for whom they pay child support (see section II.A). This is evident from an analysis of Table 14. These results show a much higher proportion of separated fathers contacted by the 1995 GSS claiming to contribute to their children's maintenance than statistics on child support payments have led us to expect, and a proportion that is higher when the respondent is the father rather than the mother (77.9 percent against 51.6 percent). Regardless of the child sample bias, fathers are less inclined (61.0 percent) to provide financial support for their children's needs when they rarely or never see them than when they spend between a week and five months with them (more than 80 percent).

The relationship between the frequency of father/child contact and the financial support provided by the father is even more clear when looked at from the mothers' perspective. According to mothers, three times as many children who spent more than a week in the previous year with their fathers benefited from their financial support than did those who had virtually lost contact with their fathers (more than 60 percent as against 21.8 percent). Also, according to mothers, almost a quarter of children spending at least five months with their father during the previous year had received no financial assistance; this information is probably given by women putting a strict "child support" interpretation on the question.

Table 14: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to 1) whether or not they receive financial assistance from their father and 2) the level of satisfaction with this support, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father[a]

	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
1) Father made a financial contribution[b]:					
Father					
- Yes	61.0	83.5	91.2	75.8	77.9
- No	39.0	16.5	8.8	24.2	22.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 27.748$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 1					
Mother					
- Yes	21.8	65.8	62.4	76.8	51.6
- No	78.2	34.2	37.6	23.2	48.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 127.391$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 8					
2) Level of satisfaction with father's financial contribution[c]:					
Father					
- Satisfied	68.6	76.4	73.9	89.8	76.5
- Dissatisfied	23.8	23.6	24.7	10.2	21.5
- No opinion	7.6	---	1.4	---	2.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 16.701$, $p = 0.010$, missing cases: 4					
Mother					
- Satisfied	63.3	50.9	76.8	88.5	67.8
- Dissatisfied	36.3	45.6	23.2	10.6	30.6
- No opinion	0.4	3.5	---	0.9	1.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 37.212$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 4					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

a Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

b Question asked only for children not living full-time with their father: 351 children reported by fathers; 662 by mothers.

c Among children for whom fathers provided financial support: 273 children reported by fathers; 337 by mothers.

Only fathers claiming to have made a contribution to their child's financial support were questioned on their satisfaction with the amount they paid. In 77 cases where fathers admitted making no payment for their child, therefore, we have no information on how fathers felt about the situation; to this number are added a further 67 children for whom the question was not even asked, as they were reported to be living full-time with their father. Among the 269 children who had received some financial support, three-quarters of the fathers declared being satisfied with their contribution; the level of satisfaction was particularly high for those with the closest contact with their children.

In approximately 20 percent of the total number of cases, fathers were dissatisfied with the amount of financial support they paid. Most often, they complained of paying too much (45.1 percent), though fathers with little or no contact with their children rarely expressed this

particular source of dissatisfaction (data not presented). For one-third of children, fathers considered their contribution to be inadequate; for another quarter (22.5 percent), the "other reasons" offered for the lack of satisfaction were generally linked either to the feeling that the money did not directly benefit the child, or to their own inability to pay more.

To make the mother and father reports comparable, the analysis included only the opinions of mothers who in fact received financial support from the father; children for whom the mother reported that the father had not contributed were eliminated. Although women declared themselves dissatisfied with the economic support provided by fathers more often than men (30.6 percent versus 21.5 percent), seven out of ten were nonetheless satisfied when the father made a contribution. The mothers, like the fathers, expressed lower levels of dissatisfaction when the child spent five months or more with his/her father. Finally, the main source of dissatisfaction expressed by mothers concerned the amount of support offered, which was generally judged to be insufficient (data not presented); in a quarter of cases, women declared that the father had not paid the amount required by the court.

Other research (Seltzer, 1994) indicates that the payment of child support by fathers depends more on their satisfaction with custody arrangements than on the type of arrangement itself. Data from the 1995 GSS does not reveal a priori any such association: whether one considers the place and person with whom the child lives, or the amount of father/child contact, the proportion of fathers who reported offering financial support for the child's needs did not vary according to the degree of satisfaction expressed (data not presented). One cannot conclude, however, that no association between these variables exists, as these findings could as easily be explained by either the bias in the child sample or the lack of precision in the question on financial support.

D. THE ROLE OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM IN CHILD CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS

An error in the pathway followed by the GSS questionnaire meant that the two questions on the court's role in determining custody arrangements were not asked for children who lived full-time with the other parent during the previous year. This information is missing, therefore, for the 81 children declared by fathers to have spent the last twelve months with their mother, a figure equal to almost 20 percent of the sample of children reported by fathers, and affecting principally those with little contact with their father. Fortunately, this problem affects children reported by mothers to a much lesser degree; mothers only reported that 14 children had spent the entire year with their father, equal to less than 2 percent of the sample declared by mothers. Only the information provided by women, therefore, is sufficiently exhaustive to evaluate the court's role in custody decisions for children of separated parents as a whole. However, for the sub-sample of children who spent more than a week per year with their father, the information provided by male and female respondents is comparable (see Table 15).

Table 15: Distribution (%) of children aged 0-17 years according to 1) whether or not custody had been settled through the legal system and 2) how far the respondents had kept to the court's recommendation, by the sex of the respondent and the time spent with the father[a]

	Time spent with the child				
	Less than 1 week	1 week to 2 months	2 to 5 months	5 months and over	Total
1) Custody settled through the legal system[b]					
Father					
- Yes	-	60.8	56.6	58.0	-
- No	-	39.2	43.4	42.0	-
Total	-	100	100	100	-
χ^2 not calculated[c]					
Mother					
- Yes	58.6	55.2	54.7	42.7	54.4
- No	41.2	44.8	45.3	57.3	45.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 7.170$, $p = 0.067$, missing cases: 4					
2) Relative to the court's recommendation, fathers saw their children[d]...					
According to fathers					
- As recommended	-	41.2	48.0	65.0	-
- Less time	-	45.7	7.1	4.5	-
- More time	-	13.1	44.9	30.5	-
Total	-	100	100	100	-
χ^2 not calculated[c]					
According to mothers[e]					
- As recommended	38.6	56.0	67.0	53.8	51.5
- Less time	60.1	40.0	33.0	22.0	43.9
- More time	1.3	4.0	-	24.2	4.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100
$\chi^2 = 62.355$, $p = 0.001$, missing cases: 17					

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

a Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size.

b Question asked only for children not living full-time with their father : 351 children reported by fathers; 662 by mothers.

c χ^2 not calculated for children reported by fathers, given that most missing values involve children with no contact with their father.

d Question asked only if the child's custody was settled through the legal system: 190 children reported by fathers; 358 by mothers.

e The information provided by female respondents on the time they spent with the child relative to the court's recommendation was used to calculate this distribution; if the mother declared spending more time than suggested with the child, the father was assumed to spend less time, and vice versa.

In slightly more than half the cases, the court had decided the child's custody. The existence of such a decision appears to have no significant impact on the time spent with the father.

For children whose custody had been decided in court, respondents were asked whether the time they spent with their child corresponded to the time recommended by the court. To compare responses made by male and female respondents, we inverted the women's replies to this question. In other words, when a women reported spending more time than suggested by the court, we inferred that this was because the father spent less time with his child; inversely, we concluded that a father had more contact than recommended by the court when the mother stated that she spent less time with the child.

How far do parents follow the court's decision regarding frequency of visits? In approximately half the cases where parents declared court involvement. For the other half, the majority of fathers declared more frequent contact than recommend by the court, though it must be remembered that many fathers with low levels of contact have been excluded from the analysis. Mothers provide an image diametrically opposed to the one given by fathers: according to them, less than 5 percent of children with a court order saw their father more often than the court ruled. The disparity between these two sets of responses is closely linked to the fact that fathers with little contact are excluded from the analysis, but it also reflects, no doubt, the different perceptions that fathers and mothers have of the time they spend with their children (Lin *et al.*, 1998). For even when we focus on children who spent at least two months with their father, the discrepancy in the statements made by men and women persists, with a consistently higher proportion of mothers stating that fathers spent less than the recommended time with their children. These differences between the sexes underline how important it will be to study the perceptions of both fathers and mothers if we are ultimately to find ways of maintaining or even increasing the contact between fathers and their children.

V. FACTORS AFFECTING THE FREQUENCY OF FATHER/CHILD CONTACT

The aim of this section is to identify the net effect of factors influencing the frequency of contact fathers have with their children after separation. Our objective, in other words, is to measure the net effect of certain variables, such as the child's age at separation or the socio-economic situation of fathers, on the amount of time fathers spend with children once all the variables under consideration have been controlled for.

The fact that fathers can have several children whom they see at different frequencies gives the data a particular structure (termed "hierarchical"). The dependent variable (the frequency of father/child contact) whose variation we are attempting to explain is measured separately for each child. Certain of the independent variables included in the analysis are measured for each child (such as the child's age at separation), while others concern the characteristics of fathers (such as his level of education). The traditional regression methods cannot be used to analyze this type of data without introducing a statistical bias. Consequently, we employed a multi-level regression analysis.[8]

In the first analysis, we explored the extent to which father/child contact varies according to the socio-demographic characteristics of fathers and their children. In the second, we attempted to measure to what point the fathers' behaviour is linked to their attitudes and perceptions towards their paternal role, once their socio-demographic characteristics and those of their children are controlled for.

A. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Our findings, presented in earlier sections of this report, influenced the choice of variables to be included in the multi-level regression analysis. The following "child" characteristics were selected: sex, age at survey, age at separation, time elapsed since separation, parents' conjugal situation at the child's birth and the distance between the parents' respective homes (see Table 16). The "father" characteristics include: age at survey, education, work pattern, and subsequent family history: forming a new union, having another child or living with a new partner's children. The "work pattern" variable combines information gathered at the time of the survey, and classifies fathers into one of four categories: 1) those who did not work during the year preceding the survey; 2) those who worked part time;[9] 3) those with full-time employment and day-time hours (the reference category in the equation); and 4) those with full-time employment who regularly worked evenings, nights or weekends.

Table 16 presents the regression coefficients associated with the socio-demographic characteristics of fathers and children, as well as a series of other statistics. The constant in model 1 corresponds to the average value of the dependent variable, and is equal to the square

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[8] See Appendix 1 for a presentation of the method. The authors wish to thank Alain Marchand for conducting the multi-level regression analyses and for his judicious advice in interpreting the results.

[9] Fathers who, in the course of the previous year, had worked less that 32 weeks or who had worked an average of less than 30 hours per week were classified as working part time.

root of the average number of days fathers spent with their children. Once squared, the number indicates that each child spent an average of 70 days a year with his or her father. Most of the observed variation in the number of days fathers and children spent together is located at the father level:[10] 78 percent of the total variation in the number of days comes from differences between the fathers; consequently, only 22 percent of the variation is situated at the child level. In other words, the analysis reveals that fathers have much the same behaviour with each of their children and that differences observed between children of the same father are relatively small.

Model 4 integrates both the father and the child characteristics. The regression coefficients presented for this model indicate the net effect that each of the independent variables has on the time fathers spent with children when the father and child characteristics are both controlled for. A negative coefficient indicates that the variable in question decreased the amount of contact while a positive coefficient increased it.

Examining the coefficients associated with the child variables shows that the frequency of father/child contact is positively linked to the child's age at the time of the survey (a coefficient of 0.214). In other words, fathers have more contact with older children and this effect remains even when the length of time since separation was taken into account. Moreover, contact tends to decrease as the time since separation (or since birth, in the case of children born outside a union) lengthens, and this decline occurs at a slightly quicker rate than the increase of contact linked to children's age (standardised coefficients of –0.192 compared with +0.179; data not shown). The distance separating the parents' homes also has a significant influence on the frequency of contact between fathers and children. Thus, when mothers and fathers live 50 kilometres or more apart, children see their father much less often than when the distance separating the two households is less than 10 kilometres (reference group in the equation).

The child's sex does not seem to have any significant link with the time children spend with fathers, once the other socio-demographic characteristics have been controlled. Likewise, the conjugal situation of parents at the birth of the child has no significant impact on the frequency of contact. The link between these variables observed earlier may have been caused by differences in the age of children or in the time elapsed since separation rather than by differences in the type of union itself. For instance, children born within a cohabiting union were perhaps younger when their parents separated than were those born to parents who had married directly, which would partly explain why they saw their father less frequently.

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[10] The inter-class correlation, which represents the relation between the variance of fathers and the sum of the variance of fathers and children, is estimated at 0.78 (i.e. [26.16 / (26.16 + 7.24)] = 0.78).

Table 16: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of the survey and the time elapsed since separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children (Coefficients γ of the multi-level regression model)[a]

Variable[b]	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	8.328	8.879	-11.230	-8.984
Child variables				
Sex (boys)		0.173		-0.061
Age at time of survey		0.219*		0.214*
Time elapsed since separation		-0.263*		-0.342*
Type of union at birth (marriage)				
- Out of union		-0.078		0.160
- Marriage preceded by cohabitation		-1.232		-1.011
- Cohabitation		-0.279		0.073
Distance (< 10 km)				
- 10 – 49 km		0.100		-0.390
- 50 – 499 km		-2.010*		-1.827*
- 400 km and over		-3.278*		-3.063*
Father variables				
Age			1.167*	1.094*
$(Age)^2$			-0.015*	-0.014*
Highest level of education (Secondary)				
- < Secondary			-1.158	-1.211
- Post-secondary			-0.280	-0.123
- University			-1.398	-0.959
Employment (Full-time/day)				
- Unemployed			-2.450	-1.598
- Part-time			-2.654*	-2.634*
- Full-time/evening, night or weekend			-1.140	-1.318
New union (no)			-0.204	0.536
Child born in new union (no)			-1.516	-0.440
Stepchild (no)			0.640	0.428
Variance – level 2	26.16	23.36	22.93	20.33
Variance – level 1	7.24	6.82	7.24	6.86
Deviance	2747.25	2711.99	2730.75	2696.44
χ^2 (degrees of freedom)	n.a.	35.26 (9)	16.51 (11)	50.80 (21)
R^2_2	n.a.	0.10	0.10	0.20
R^2_1	n.a.	0.10	0.10	0.18

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
a Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size (N_1 = 408 children and N_2 = 285 fathers).
b For the dichotomous and polytomous variables, the reference category is given in brackets.
* Coefficient is significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Among the father characteristics, only their age at the time of the survey and the work pattern in the year preceding the survey appear to be significantly linked to the degree of father/child contact. Neither education, nor a more recent union, and having new children or living with step-children within this union, show any significant influence on the amount of time fathers and children spend together.

Fathers' age has a non-linear effect on frequency of contact. The regression coefficients attached to the age and to the age-squared are both significant. The first coefficient is positive, showing that the number of days spent with children increases as fathers' age at survey increases, up to a certain age; after this age, contact levels start to decline, as indicated by the negative coefficient for the age-squared. Constructing the curve attached to these regression coefficients shows that contacts increase until the age of 39 years, and then start to decrease beyond this age.

Moreover, fathers working part-time spend less time with their children than fathers employed full-time during the day (coefficient of –2.634 for the former compared with 0 for the latter). One might have expected the opposite result, on the assumption that fathers who work part-time would have more free time to devote to their children. This finding may, however, reflect the income effect. Fathers with only part-time work are likely to have a lower average employment income than those working full-time. As mentioned earlier, fathers with higher incomes tend to see their children more regularly, and this could explain the association between part-time work and less father/child contact. The small sample size,[11] however, makes it impossible to ascertain to what extent this association is caused by income variations, since full-time workers generally have higher incomes, or by differences in the fathers' availability, since part-time work is often characterised by atypical working hours.

The children's age at the time of the survey, their age at separation, and the time elapsed since the separation are three variables closely linked to one another; they cannot therefore be included simultaneously in the equation. To evaluate the relative importance of each of these three variables on the frequency of father/child contact, tables 17 and 18 repeat the analysis presented in Table 16, but with a change in the variables in the equation.

[11] We did not include fathers' income in the equation given the high number of missing values for this variable. Moreover, the number of fathers in part-time employment is too small to be able to take into account the work timetable within this category.

Table 17: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of the survey and at the time of separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children (Coefficients γ of the multi-level regression model)[a]

Variable[b]	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	8.328	6.986	-11.230	-10.470
Child variables				
Sex (boys)		0.184		-0.016
Age at time of survey		-0.021		-0.099
Age at separation		1.627*		1.504*
(Age at separation)^2		-0.231*		-0.200*
(Age at separation)^3		0.010		0.009*
Type of union at birth (marriage)				
- Out of union		1.059		1.148
- Marriage preceded by cohabitation		-1.546		-1.273
- Cohabitation		-0.074		0.240
Distance (< 10 km)				
- 10 – 49 km		0.261		-0.211
- 50 – 499 km		-1.910*		-1.758*
- 400 km and over		-3.002*		-2.855*
Father variables				
Age			1.167*	1.081*
(Age)^2			-0.015*	-0.014*
Highest level of education (Secondary)				
- < Secondary			-1.158	-1.320
- Post-secondary			-0.280	-0.253
- University			-1.398	-0.908
Employment (Full-time/day)				
- Unemployed			-2.450	-1.443
- Part-time			-2.654*	-2.340*
- Full-time/evening, night or weekend			-1.140	-1.169
New union (no)			-0.204	0.380
Child born in new union (no)			-1.516	-0.445
Stepchild (no)			0.640	0.343
Variance – level 2	26.16	22.81	22.93	20.15
Variance – level 1	7.24	6.60	7.24	6.63
Deviance	2747.25	2709.43	2730.75	2692.91
χ^2 (degrees of freedom)	n.a.	37.82 (11)	16.51 (11)	54.33 (22)
R^2_2	n.a.	0.12	0.10	0.21
R^2_1	n.a.	0.12	0.10	0.20

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size (N_1 = 408 children and N_2 = 285 fathers).

[b] For the dichotomous and polytomous variables, the reference category is given in brackets.

* Coefficient is significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Table 18: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at the time of separation and the time elapsed since separation) on the time that separated fathers spend with their children (Coefficients γ of the multi-level regression model) [a]

Variable[b]	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	8.328	6.986	-11.230	-10.500
Child variables				
Sex (boys)		0.184		-0.016
Time elapsed since separation		-0.021		-0.099
Age at separation		1.607*		1.406*
(Age at separation)^2		-0.231*		-0.200*
(Age at separation)^3		0.010*		0.009*
Type of union at birth (marriage)				
- Out of union		1.059		1.149
- Marriage preceded by cohabitation		-1.546		-1.273
- Cohabitation		-0.074		0.241
Distance (< 10 km)				
- 10 – 49 km		0.261		-0.210
- 50 – 499 km		-1.910*		-1.757*
- 400 km et plus		-3.002*		-2.855*
Father variables				
Age			1.167*	1.082*
(Age)^2			-0.015*	-0.014*
Highest level of education (Secondary)				
- < Secondary			-1.158	-1.319
- Post-secondary			-0.280	-0.253
- University			-1.398	-0.908
Employment (Full-time/day)				
- Unemployed			-2.450	-1.442
- Part-time			-2.654*	-2.339*
- Full-time/evening, night or weekend			-1.140	-1.169
New union (no)			-0.204	0.380
Child born in new union (no)			-1.516	-0.445
Stepchild (no)			0.640	0.343
Variance – level 2	26.16	22.81	22.93	20.15
Variance – level 1	7.24	6.60	7.24	6.63
Deviance	2747.25	2709.43	2730.75	2692.92
χ^2 (degrees of freedom)	n.a.	37.82 (11)	16.51 (11)	54.33 (22)
R^2_2	n.a.	0.12	0.10	0.21
R^2_1	n.a.	0.12	0.10	0.20

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.

[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size (N_1 = 408 children and N_2 = 285 fathers).

[b] For the dichotomous and polytomous variables, the reference category is given in brackets.

* Coefficient is significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Comparing the results of the two tables shows the importance of the child's age at separation for the contact they have subsequently with their father. When the child's age at separation is introduced into the model, the effect associated with the time elapsed since the separation (Table 18) and with the child's age at the time of the survey (Table 17) is no longer significant, underlining the crucial role of the point in time at which parental separation occurs in children's lives.

It should be noted, however, that the effect of the child's age at separation is not linear. To correctly model the link between age at separation and frequency of contact, we added two variables representing the age at separation squared and cubed. The first coefficient is positive, indicating at first view a positive relation between children's age at separation and the number of days spent with their father; at a particular age, this relationship is inversed and becomes negative (the coefficient of the age squared is negative) before becoming positive once again (the coefficient of the age cubed is positive). When the time since separation is controlled for (Table 18), the curve established using the regression parameters shows that the frequency of father/child contact rises as the child's age at separation increases until approximately 5.5 years; it then decreases slightly until the age of 10 years, from which point the amount of contact starts to increase sharply again. This result is hardly unexpected. During the early years of life, one might assume that maintaining father/child contact after separation is first and foremost linked to the length of time during which a father created close ties with his child. Subsequently, between 5 and 10 years, contact remains at a relatively stable level, with the rise observed from the age of 10 years probably reflecting a combination of the concrete links children established with fathers before the separation and their greater autonomy in the decision to see their father. Finally, the effect of the other variables in the analysis remains more or less stable from one table to the other, as does the proportion of the variation explained by the model.

B. ATTITUDES TO, AND PERCEPTIONS OF, THE PATERNAL ROLE

In this second step, we repeated the analysis, but integrated the elements of men's perception of the paternal role shown earlier to be linked to the frequency of father/child contact. The first of these is a variable measured for the children, opposing fathers who declared themselves satisfied with the existing custody arrangements (where and with whom the child lived) with those who were not satisfied. Also included is a series of variables measured for each father. The first combines information concerning how close fathers felt to their own father during childhood and how they compare with him in terms of their paternal role, organized into four categories: 1) the reference category, comprising fathers who were close to their own father during childhood but who feel that they themselves are better fathers; 2) fathers who were close to their father but who do not consider themselves better; 3) fathers who were not close to their own father and who feel they are better fathers; and 4) fathers who were not very close to their father,[12] but do not feel they are better fathers (see Table 19). The other variables included in the model contrast:
1) fathers who strongly disagree with the statement that "everyday tasks linked to children are not principally men's responsibility" with the other fathers (including those without an opinion);
2) fathers who felt that "the fact of having children made them happier" with those who did not;

[12] Fathers who did not feel very close to their own father includes also those who were without an opinion on the subject; the same is true for those who do not consider themselves better fathers.

and last 3) fathers who were satisfied with the "time spent in general with the children" with those who were dissatisfied.

The results of this analysis, with the child's age at separation and the time elapsed since separation included in the model, are presented in Table 19. First, including the variables linked to fathers' perception of their paternal role increases the proportion of variation explained between fathers and between children, from around 20 percent to 30 percent (compare the R^2 in model 4 of tables 18 and 19). Introducing these variables into the analysis, however, hardly changes the impact of fathers' and children's socio-demographic characteristics on the amount of time they spend together. Thus, the child's age at separation, the father's age at the time of the survey and his work pattern remain significantly linked to the level of father/child contact. However, the distance separating the parents' domiciles is no longer significant once the attitude and perception variables are added to the model. This is because fathers who live far from their children and who see them less often are also less likely to declare themselves happy to have had children and satisfied with the time they spend with them in general.

Table 19: Effect of a number of socio-demographic characteristics (including the children's age at separation and the time elapsed since separation) and attitudinal variables on the time that separated fathers spend with their children (Coefficients γ of the multi-level regression model) [a]

Variable[b]	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	8.528	5.360	-8.783	-11.230
Child variables				
Sex (boys)		0.309		-0.056
Time elapsed since separation		-0.059		-0.121
Age at separation		1.444*		1.156*
(Age at separation)^2		-0.215*		-0.173*
(Age at separation)^3		0.009*		0.008*
Type of union at birth (marriage)				
- Out of union		1.501		1.267
- Marriage preceded by cohabitation		-1.059		-1.351
- Cohabitation		0.593		1.080
Distance (< 10 km)				
- 10 – 49 km		0.297		-0.032
- 50 – 499 km		-1.458		-0.561
- 400 km and over		-2.997*		-1.562
Satisfied with custody (no)		2.499*		1.446*

Table 19: (cont'd)

Variable[b]	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Father variables				
Age			0.802*	0.876*
$(Age)^2$			-0.011*	-0.012*
Highest level of education (Secondary)				
- < Secondary			-1.112	-1.111
- Post-secondary			-0.664	-0.575
- University			-1.517	-1.193
Employment (Full-time/day)				
- Unemployed			-0.726	-0.190
- Part-time			-3.103*	-2.538*
- Full-time/evening, night or weekend			-1.278	-0.965
New union (no)			0.120	0.541
Child born in new union (no)			-1.103	-0.725
Stepchild (no)			-0.497	-0.717
Relationship with own father (very close / better)				
- Very close / not better			-0.730	-1.126
- Not very close / better			0.406	0.102
- Not very close / not better			-0.956	-1.171
Not responsible for childcare tasks (strongly disagree)			1.581*	0.847
Happy to have had child (no)			2.495*	2.293*
Satisfied with time with child (no)			3.843*	3.001*
Variance – level 2	25.49	21.76	17.60	16.61
Variance – level 1	7.68	6.79	7.66	6.93
Deviance	2533.76	2488.43	2472.08	2447.13
χ^2 (degrees of freedom)	n.a.	45.33 (12)	61.68 (17)	86.60 (29)
R^2_2	n.a.	0.14	0.25	0.30
R^2_1	n.a.	0.14	0.24	0.29

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (GSS), Cycle 10: the Family, 1995.
[a] Weighted data, brought back to the original sample size (N_1 = 408 children and N_2 = 285 fathers).
[b] For the dichotomous and polytomous variables, the reference category is given in brackets.
* Coefficient is significant at the 0.05 threshold.

The results presented in Table 19 are as we expected. It is impossible, however, to draw any conclusion as to the direction of the observed relation between fathers' attitudes and perceptions and the amount of contact they have with their children: is the satisfaction expressed by fathers concerning custody arrangements or the fact of having had children, for example, the cause or the consequence of how much time they spend with their children? In other words, we cannot determine how far the degree of satisfaction that fathers express about their paternal role has a direct influence on amount of father/child contact or if, on the contrary, this satisfaction is the direct result of the number of days they spend with them. To do this, it would be necessary to carry out further analyses that are outside the framework of the present study.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The increase in separation and divorce since the early 1970s has considerably modified the relationship between fathers and children. Following a separation, children often stop living with their father and, eventually, a sizeable proportion of them lose contact with him. Yet whether the contact is maintained or not has important consequences for children's living conditions since, as various studies have shown, a father's propensity to fulfil his financial obligations towards his children appears to be closely linked to the amount of contact he has with them (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais, 1999). Unearthing the factors likely to increase the frequency of father/child contact is, therefore, essential if we wish to reduce the risk of poverty to which children of separated parents are exposed. This is the primary objective of the present research. As a first step, we attempted to measure the amount of contact separated fathers have with their children; we then tried to uncover the factors likely to increase the frequency of contact. The analyses were based on a sample of 418 Canadian children (biological or adopted), aged from 0 to 17 years; these children had been declared by 291 fathers who were living apart from the child's mother when they were contacted by the General Social Survey (GSS), in 1995.

The originality of this study lies primarily in the fact that it looks at the problem from the male perspective rather than being based uniquely on information from women, as has been the case in the past; in addition, it combines information related both to fathers and to their children. For the first time in Canada, the 1995 GSS gathered information from separated fathers themselves about the amount of time they spent with their children; this allowed us to adopt a male-centred approach, and take fathers' attitudes and perceptions of the paternal role into consideration. Moreover, applying a multi-level approach to the regression analysis meant that we could correctly model the effect of characteristics measured separately for children and fathers on the amount of father/child contact; in other words, we were able to integrate into the model the fact that fathers do not necessarily have the same behaviour with all their children.

The analysis showed that almost two-thirds of children declared by their father had regular contact with him (that is, they spent five months or more with him during the year preceding the survey); at the other extreme, almost a quarter of children had little or no contact with their father (i.e. they spent less than 7 days with him in the previous year), and one child out of six had not seen him at all. In reality, the portrait may well be more sombre than that painted here. According to the mothers interviewed at the 1995 GSS, one child out of four, rather than one out of six, had not seen his or her father in the twelve months prior to the survey, and only 17 percent (rather than 30 percent) spent five months or more with him. Over and above the fact that separated mothers and fathers probably over-estimate the time they spend with children, the difference between men and women is linked to the fact that, compared with fathers who have all but lost contact with their children, fathers who see them regularly are not only more likely to be reached by surveys like the GSS, but will also declare correctly the number of children they had in the past.

The 1995 GSS also contains information on the telephone or letter contact that fathers have with children. Analyzing this data showed that this form of communication is not a substitute for visits, used by fathers living far from their children. On the contrary, the more often men see their children, the more they are likely to communicate with them by letter or telephone

frequently. Moreover, among fathers who regularly have letter or telephone contact, the majority live relatively close to their child's residence.

A number of findings emerged from the cross-tabulations and the multilevel regression analysis of the factors associated with the frequency of father/child contact. First, and as we might intuitively have expected, fathers have similar behaviour with each of their children, once child characteristics (sex, age at separation etc.) are controlled for. In other words, the multi-level regression analysis demonstrated that approximately 75 percent of the observed variation in the number of days fathers and children spend together are the result of differences between the fathers, implying that differences observed between the children of the same father are relatively small.

Second, the moment at which the parent's separation occurs in the child's life seems to be a determining factor in the amount of father/child contact. Once this variable was taken into account, the observed association between the frequency of contact and the child's age at the time of the survey on the one hand and the length of time since the separation on the other disappeared, underlining the crucial role played by the child's age at separation in determining the course their future relationship with their father is likely to take. Up to the age of 5.5 years, the number of days children spent with their father grew, as the age of the child at separation increased; it more or less levelled out subsequently until pre-adolescence when the amount of contact started to rise again sharply.

Third, the geographic distance separating the separated parents' households is negatively linked to the amount of time fathers spend with their children. Thus, children who lived 50 kilometres or more from their father's home saw him much less often than those living less than 10 kilometres away, and the impact of this variable remained significant when the socio-demographic characteristics of fathers and children were controlled for. With the introduction into the equation of the fathers' attitude and perception variables, the coefficients associated with distance were considerably lower, losing their statistical significance. This implies that a part of the negative effect previously attributed to distance came from the fact that fathers living far from their children are less likely to report that they are happy to have children and to express more dissatisfaction with the time they spent with them.

It is not possible to determine here to what extent the level of happiness or satisfaction expressed by fathers is the cause or the consequence of the distance separating them from their children. One thing is clear, however. There is a close association between the attitudes and perceptions of fathers and the frequency of contact with their children, a finding that constitutes the fourth highlight of our conclusion. Thus, fathers who considered that having a child made them happier, and who claimed to be satisfied with both the custody arrangements and the time they spent with their children, were also those who spent most time with them. These results present an image of fathers committed to their children that contrasts strongly with the one often presented by the media, that of absent fathers uninvolved with their children. They also underline how important it is for parents to agree about custody arrangements if separated fathers are to maintain a special relationship with their children and fulfil their financial obligations towards them; these two behaviours go hand in hand, as recent research has shown (for a review, see Le Bourdais et al., 1998).

A fifth finding is that the frequency of father/child contact is associated with the father's age and his work pattern during the year preceding the survey. The number of days spent with children grew as the age of fathers reached by the GSS increased, up to the age of about forty years, from which point it started to decline. Moreover, fathers who work part-time spent considerably less time with their children than those working regular daytime hours on a full time basis. Somewhat surprising at first, this result reflects perhaps the fact that men with regular daytime work have fixed schedules which may match better their children's timetable than part-time workers whose hours often vary; they are also likely to have higher incomes which, as we have seen, is a factor associated with more frequent father/child contact. In this sense, our findings suggest that fathers whose income does not permit them to fulfil their financial obligations towards their children will at times cut the links with their children rather than remain in a situation that they find too uncomfortable.

Sixthly, we were surprised to discover that certain variables shown in the literature to play an important role had no significant effect on the time fathers living apart from their child's mother spent with the child. In particular, we were struck by the absence of a significant relation between the conjugal situation of parents at their child's birth and the frequency of father/child contact after separation. Likewise, we had not expected to find that forming a new conjugal union, or having a baby with this new union, had no significant influence on the time that fathers spend with children.

Several elements could explain why these variables had no significant effect. First, the small sample size is undoubtedly partly responsible for the absence of statistical significance of coefficients with relatively high values. In addition, the bias in the sample of children reported by fathers certainly plays a part. Other studies (Cooksey and Craig, 1999; Seltzer, 1991) have shown that separated fathers who were never married to or never lived with the mother of their child are more likely to have little or no contact with their children. Given the greater difficulty of reaching fathers who rarely see their children, a sizeable fraction of these men may well have been excluded from the GSS sample. This sample bias could, therefore, partly explain the absence of a significant link between the frequency of father/child contact and the conjugal situation of parents at their child's birth, or with the family trajectory followed by fathers after they separate. On this subject, it should be kept in mind that the conjugal and parental life of the majority of separated fathers does not stop at the relationship surrounding the child's birth. More than half had already entered a new union between the separation and the survey; approximately one father out of eight had lived with the children of his new partner, and a similar proportion had fathered additional children within the new relationship.

Other analyses need to be carried out if we hope to reach a fuller understanding of the process set in motion by separation. For this, access to longitudinal data that follow the same individuals through the different stages of their lives is imperative. Such data are essential if we are ever to succeed in disentangling the cohort effect from that caused by the simple passage of time in the results that we observed. Our study showed, for example, that the frequency of father/child contact varies according to the age of fathers at the time of the survey and the age of children at the separation. These findings are not based on a sample of men and children followed through time, but rather on a sample of men and children interviewed only once in 1995. How should the observed relation between the frequency of contact and the father's age at the time of the survey be interpreted? Does the fact that the frequency of contact increases with the age of fathers until

around forty years, when it starts to decrease, indicate a life-cycle (or passage of time) effect, meaning that fathers lose interest in their children after a certain age. Or, is it rather a cohort effect, with men from younger generations more inclined to maintain links with their children? Similarly, one wonders whether the effect of the child's age at separation is a real effect of age, or whether children were exposed to different processes at the time of separation? The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), which tracks a large sample of Canadian children as they grow up, will make it possible to answer some of these questions and to clarify the course of father/child contact set in motion by parental separation. This is one of the avenues of research that we intend to pursue in the future, by exploiting data from successive waves of the NLSCY.

At the same time, this research should be enhanced by analyses based on other surveys, such as the General Social Survey on the Family to be carried out by Statistics Canada in 2001. Despite the richness of the NLSCY data, it has a major weakness when it comes to explaining why fathers remain close to their children in the event of a separation: very few fathers were interviewed in the context of the NLSCY. The "person most knowledgeable" about the child was asked to reply to the questions; more than 90 percent of the time, this person was a woman, in most cases the mother of the child. The NLSCY does not, therefore, make it possible to broach the question of father/child contact directly from the man's point of view. The 2001 GSS has great research potential in other ways. First, the majority of difficulties that we experienced in the present study (such as the problem with the paths followed by the questionnaire) should be ironed out by the next survey. In addition, the sample is much larger (by two to three times) than in 1995, and should therefore permit more sophisticated analyses than those carried out here.

APPENDIX 1

The data has a hierarchical structure, in that the children (level 1) are "nested" within fathers (level 2), as fathers may have more than one child. The dependent variable (frequency of father/child contact) is measured at the level of each child, while the independent variables are measured either for the children, or for the fathers. This type of data cannot be analyzed using conventional regression models estimated using the ordinary least squares method, for the hierarchical data structure introduces dependency and covariance between observations sharing the same context (i.e. children with the same father); this produces unstable estimates and biased standard errors. Consequently, we used a "multi-level" type of model to correctly estimate the effect of the independent variables (see Bryk and Raudenbaush, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Marchand, forthcoming). Multi-level models do not assume that observations are independent, and they have the property of producing stable parameter estimates and unbiased standard errors that take into account the covariance between observations (Hox and Kreft, 1994). This method makes it possible to distinguish the proportion of the dependent variable's variation coming from differences between children from that coming from differences between fathers, and to evaluate the contribution made by the independent variables to explaining the variation at each level of the data hierarchy.

The estimation of parameters is based on Goldstein's (1986) iterative generalised least square (IGLS) and is integrated into the software MlwiN (Goldstein et al., 1998). Where they converge, the estimates are those with the maximum likelihood. MlwiN produces standard errors for the fixed and random parts of the model, as well as a deviance value (-2 log-likelihood) that could be used to calculate a likelihood ratio test, the latter having a chi-square distribution with a number of degrees of freedom equal to the additional model parameters (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992).

The dependent variable included in the regression analysis is the number of days (continuous duration) that fathers spent with children in the course of the year preceding the survey or, more exactly, the square root of this number of days; this transformation was made because the number of days did not follow the normal distribution required by the regression model. Certain independent variables, such as age or the time since separation, are introduced into the model as continuous variables; others, measuring either a state (such as the type of parental union at birth) or a threshold effect (such as level of education), have been entered in the form of dichotomous or polytomous variables, and the reference category is given in brackets (see Table 16).

Tables 16 through 19 present the results of the multi-level regression analyses. They contain the regression coefficients associated with the father and child characteristics, as well as a series of other statistics, among which are the proportion of variation in the number days explained by the independent variables included in the model (R^2), and the variance calculated for the fathers (level 2) and children (level 1). For example, the child characteristics taken as a whole (included in model 2 of Table 16) explain 10 percent of the variation between children (R^2_1) and 10 percent of the variation between fathers (R^2_2). This contribution is statistically significant at a threshold of 0.001 (χ^2=35.26 with 9 degrees of freedom).

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